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‘I SAY NO!’

Or, the Robe-Letter Answered.

By WILKIE COLLINS.\*

BOOK THE FIRST.

At School.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SMUGGLED SUPPER.

OUTSIDE the bedroom the night was black and still.

The small rain fell too softly to be heard in the garden; not a leaf stirred in the airless calm; the watch-dog was asleep, the cats were indoors: far or near, under the murky heaven, not a sound was stirring.

Inside the bedroom the night was black and still.

Miss Ladd knew her business as a schoolmistress too well to allow night-lights; and Miss Ladd's young ladies were supposed to be fast asleep, in accordance with the rules of the house. Only at intervals the silence was faintly disturbed, when the restless turning of one of the girls in her bed betrayed itself by a gentle rustling between the sheets. In the long intervals of stillness, not even the softly-audible breathing of young creatures asleep was to be heard.

The first sound that told of life

and movement revealed the mechanical movement of the clock. Speaking from the lower regions, the tongue of Father Time told the hour before midnight.

A soft voice rose wearily near the door of the room. It counted the strokes of the clock—and reminded one of the girls of the lapse of time.

‘Emily! eleven o’clock.’

There was no reply. After an interval the weary voice tried again, in louder tones.

‘Emily!’

A girl whose bed was at the inner end of the room sighed under the heavy heat of the night, and said, in peremptory tones,

‘Is that Cecilia?’

‘Yes.’

‘What do you want?’

‘I’m getting hungry, Emily. Is the new girl asleep?’

The new girl answered promptly and spitefully,

‘No, she isn’t.’

Having a private object of their own in view, the five wise virgins of Miss Ladd’s first class had

\* *The Right of Translation is Reserved.*

waited an hour, in wakeful anticipation of the falling asleep of the stranger—and it had ended in this way! A ripple of laughter ran round the room. The new girl, mortified and offended, entered her protest in plain words.

'You are treating me shamefully! You all distrust me, because I am a stranger.'

'Say we don't understand you,' Emily answered, speaking for her schoolfellows, 'and you will be nearer the truth.'

'Who expected you to understand me, when I only came here to-day? I have told you already my name is Francine de Sor. If you want to know more, I'm nineteen years old, and I come from the West Indies.'

Emily still took the lead.

'Why do you come *here*?' she asked. 'Who ever heard of a girl joining a new school just before the holidays! You are nineteen years old, are you? I'm a year younger than you, and I have finished my education. The next big girl in the room is a year younger than me, and she has finished her education. What can you possibly have left to learn at your age?'

'Everything!' cried the stranger from the West Indies, with an outburst of tears. 'I'm a poor ignorant creature. Your education ought to have taught you to pity me instead of making fun of me. I hate you all. For shame, for shame!'

Some of the girls laughed. One of them—the hungry girl who had counted the strokes of the clock—took Francine's part.

'Never mind their laughing, Miss de Sor. You are quite right; you have good reason to complain of us.'

Miss de Sor dried her eyes.

'Thank you—whoever you are,' she answered briskly.

'My name is Cecilia Wyvil,' the other proceeded. 'It was not, perhaps, quite nice of you to say you hated us all. At the same time we have forgotten our good breeding, and the least we can do is to beg your pardon.'

This expression of generous sentiment appeared to have an irritating effect on the peremptory young person who took the lead in the room. Perhaps she disapproved of free trade in generous sentiment.

'I can tell you one thing, Cecilia,' she said; 'you shan't beat me in generosity. Strike a light, one of you, and lay the blame on me if Miss Ladd finds us out. I mean to shake hands with the new girl, and how can I do it in the dark? Miss de Sor, my name's Brown, and I'm queen of the bedroom. I—not Cecilia—offer our apologies if we have offended you. Cecilia is my dearest friend, but I don't allow her to take the lead in the room. O, what a lovely night-gown!'

The sudden flow of the candle-light had revealed Francine, sitting up in her bed, and displaying such treasures of real lace over her bosom that the queen lost all sense of royal dignity in irrepressible admiration. 'Seven and sixpence,' Emily remarked, looking at her own night-gown and despising it.

One after another the girls yielded to the attraction of the wonderful lace. Slim and plump, fair and dark, they circled round the new pupil in their flowing white robes, and arrived by common consent at one and the same conclusion: 'How rich her father must be!'

Favoured by Fortune in the matter of money, was this enviable person possessed of beauty as well?

In the disposition of the beds,

Miss de Sor was placed between Cecilia on the right hand, and Emily on the left. If, by some fantastic turn of events, a man—say, in the interests of propriety, a married doctor, with Miss Ladd to look after him—had been permitted to enter the room, and had been asked what he thought of the girls when he came out, he would not even have mentioned Francine. Blind to the beauties of the expensive night-gown, he would have noticed her long upper lip, her obstinate chin, her sallow complexion, her eyes placed too close together, and would have turned his attention to her nearest neighbours. On one side his languid interest would have been instantly roused by Cecilia's glowing auburn hair, her exquisitely pure skin, and her tender blue eyes. On the other, he would have discovered a bright little creature who would have fascinated and perplexed him at one and the same time. If he had been questioned about her by a stranger, he would have been at a loss to say positively whether she was dark or light: he would have remembered how her eyes had held him, but he would not have known of what colour they were. And yet she would have remained a vivid picture in his memory when other impressions, derived at the same time, had vanished. 'There was one little witch among them who was worth all the rest put together; and I can't tell you why. They called her Emily. If I wasn't a married man—' There, he would have thought of his wife, and would have sighed and said no more.

While the girls were still admiring Francine the clock struck the half-hour past eleven.

Cecilia stole on tiptoe to the door, looked out and listened, closed the door again, and ad-

dressed the meeting with the irresistible charm of her sweet voice and her persuasive smile.

'Are none of you hungry yet?' she inquired. 'The teachers are safe in their rooms; we have set ourselves right with Francine. Why keep the supper waiting under Emily's bed?'

Such reasoning as this, with such personal attractions to recommend it, admitted of but one reply. The queen waved her hand graciously, and said, 'Pull it out.'

Is a lovely girl—whose face possesses the crowning charm of expression, whose slightest movement reveals the supple symmetry of her figure—less lovely because she is blessed with a good appetite, and is not ashamed to acknowledge it? With a grace all her own, Cecilia dived under the bed, and produced a basket of jam tarts, a basket of fruit and sweetmeats, a basket of sparkling lemonade, and a superb cake, all paid for by general subscription, and smuggled into the room by kind connivance of the servants. On this occasion the feast was especially plentiful and expensive in commemoration, not only of the arrival of the Midsummer holidays, but of the coming freedom of Miss Ladd's two leading young ladies. With widely different destinies before them, Emily and Cecilia had completed their school life, and were now to go out into the world.

The contrast in the characters of the two girls showed itself, even in such a trifle as the preparations for supper.

Gentle Cecilia, sitting on the floor surrounded by good things, left it to the ingenuity of others to decide whether the baskets should be all emptied at once, or handed round from bed to bed, one at a time. In the mean while,

her lovely blue eyes rested tenderly on the tarts. Emily's commanding spirit seized on the reins of government, and employed each of her schoolfellows in the occupation which she was fittest to undertake. 'Miss de Sor, let me look at your hand. Ah! I thought so. You have got the thickest wrist among us; you shall draw the corks. If you let the lemonade pop, not a drop of it goes down your throat. Effie, Annis, Priscilla, you are three notoriously lazy girls; it's doing you a true kindness to set you to work. Effie, clear the toilette-table for supper; away with the combs, the brushes, and the looking-glass. Annis, tear up that old newspaper, and set the pieces out neatly for dishes and plates. No! I'll unpack; nobody touches the baskets but me. Priscilla, you have the prettiest ears in the room. You shall act as sentinel, my dear, and listen at the door. Cecilia, when you have done devouring those tarts with your eyes, take that pair of scissors (Miss de Sor, allow me to apologise for the mean manner in which this school is carried on; the knives and forks are counted and locked up every night)—I say take that pair of scissors, Cecilia, and carve the cake, and don't keep the largest bit for yourself. Are we all ready? Very well. Now take example by me. Talk as much as you like, so long as you don't talk too loud. There is one other thing before we begin. The men always propose toasts on these occasions; let's be like the men. Can any of you make a speech? Ah, it falls on me as usual. I propose the first toast. Down with all schools and teachers—especially the new teacher, who came this half-year. O, mercy, how it stings! The fixed gas in the lemonade took the

orator, at that moment, by the throat, and effectually checked the flow of her eloquence. It made no difference to the girls. Excepting the case of feeble stomachs, who cares for eloquence in the presence of a supper-table? There were no feeble stomachs in that bedroom. With what inexhaustible energy Miss Ladd's young ladies ate and drank! How merrily they enjoyed the delightful privilege of talking nonsense! And—alas, alas!—how vainly they tried in after life to renew the once unalloyed enjoyment of tarts and lemonade!

In the unintelligible scheme of creation there appears to be no human happiness—not even the happiness of school-girls—which is ever complete. Just as it was drawing to a close, the enjoyment of the feast was interrupted by an alarm from the sentinel at the door.

'Put out the candle!' Priscilla whispered. 'Somebody on the stairs.'

## CHAPTER II.

### BIOGRAPHY IN THE BEDROOM.

THE candle was instantly extinguished. In discreet silence the girls stole back to their beds, and listened.

As an aid to the vigilance of the sentinel, the door had been left ajar. Through the narrow opening, a creaking of the broad wooden stairs of the old house became audible. In another moment there was silence. An interval passed, and the creaking was heard again. This time the sound was distant and diminishing. On a sudden it stopped. The midnight silence was disturbed no more.

What did this mean?

Had one among the many per-



sons in authority under Miss Ladd's roof heard the girls talking, and ascended the stairs to surprise them in the act of violating one of the rules of the house? So far, such a proceeding was by no means uncommon. But was it within the limits of probability that a teacher should alter her opinion of her own duty halfway up the stairs, and deliberately go back to her room again? The bare idea of such a thing was absurd on the face of it. What more rational explanation could ingenuity discover on the spur of the moment? Francine was the first to offer a suggestion. She shook and shivered in her bed, and said, 'For heaven's sake, light the candle again! It's a Ghost.'

'Clear away the supper, you fools, before the ghost can report us to Miss Ladd.'

With this excellent advice Emily checked the rising panic. The door was closed, the candle was lit; all traces of the supper disappeared. For five minutes more they listened again. No sound came from the stairs; no teacher, or ghost of a teacher, appeared at the door.

Having eaten her supper, Cecilia's immediate anxieties were at an end; she was at leisure to exert her intelligence for the benefit of her schoolfellows. In her gentle ingratiating way, she offered a composing suggestion. 'When we heard the creaking, I don't believe there was anybody on the stairs. In these old houses there are always strange noises at night—and they say the stairs here were made more than two hundred years since.'

The girls looked at each other with a sense of relief—but they waited to hear the opinion of the queen. Emily, as usual, justified the confidence placed in her. She

discovered an ingenious method of putting Cecilia's suggestion to the test.

'Let's go on talking,' she said. 'If Cecilia is right, the teachers are all asleep, and we have nothing to fear from them. If she's wrong, we shall sooner or later see one of them at the door. Don't be alarmed, Miss de Sor. Catching us talking at night, in this school, only means a reprimand. Catching us with a light, ends in punishment. Blow out the candle.'

Francine's belief in the ghost was too sincerely superstitious to be shaken: she started up in bed. 'O, don't leave me in the dark! I'll take the punishment if we are found out.'

'On your sacred word of honour? Emily stipulated.

'Yes—yes!'

The queen's sense of humour was tickled. 'There's something funny,' she remarked, addressing her subjects, 'in a big girl like this coming to a new school and beginning with a punishment. May I ask if you are a foreigner. Miss de Sor?'

'My papa is a Spanish gentleman,' Francine answered with dignity.

'And your mamma?'

'My mamma is English.'

'And you have always lived in the West Indies?'

'I have always lived in the island of San Domingo.'

Emily checked off on her fingers the different points thus far discovered in the character of Mr. de Sor's daughter. 'She's ignorant, and superstitious, and foreign, and rich. My dear (forgive the familiarity), you are an interesting girl, and we must really know more of you. Entertain the bedroom. What have you been about all your life? And what, in the name of wonder, brings you here?'

Stop! Before you begin, I insist on one condition, in the name of all the young ladies in the room: no useful information about the West Indies!

Francine disappointed her audience.

She was ready enough to make herself an object of interest to her companions, but she was not possessed of the capacity to arrange events in their proper order, necessary to the recital of the simplest narrative. Emily was obliged to help her by means of questions. In one respect the result justified the trouble taken to obtain it. A sufficient reason was discovered for the extraordinary appearance of a new pupil on the day before the school closed for the holidays.

Mr. de Sor's social position at San Domingo had been (to use his daughter's words) the position of 'a small planter—too poor to send to France or England for a governess.' The mother's health was delicate; and the mother's interest centred in her only child—a son, born in the later years of her married life. From first to last, Francine (in her own opinion) had been shamefully neglected. Six months since, the prospects of the family had changed for the better, on the death of a bachelor relative. Mr. de Sor's brother had left him one of the finest estates in San Domingo, and a fortune in money as well, on the one easy condition that he continued to reside in the island. The question of expense being now beneath the notice of the family, Francine had been sent to England, specially recommended to Miss Ladd as a young lady with grand prospects, sorely in need of a fashionable education. The voyage had been so timed, by advice of the schoolmistress, as to make the holidays a means of obtaining this object

privately. Francine was to be taken to Brighton, where excellent masters could be obtained to assist Miss Ladd. With six weeks before her, she might in some degree make up for lost time; and, when the school opened again, she would avoid the mortification of being put down in the lowest class, along with the children.

The examination of Miss de Sor having produced these results, was pursued no further. Her character now appeared in a new, and not very attractive, light. She audaciously took to herself the whole credit of telling her story.

'I think it's my turn now,' she said, 'to be interested and amused. May I ask you to begin, Miss Emily? All I know of you at present is that your family name is Brown.'

Emily held up her hand for silence.

Was the mysterious creaking on the stairs making itself heard once more? No. The sound that had caught Emily's quick ear came from the beds, on the opposite side of the room, occupied by the three lazy girls. With no new alarm to disturb them, Effie, Annis, and Priscilla had yielded to the composing influences of a good supper and a warm night. They were fast asleep; and the fattest of the three (softly, as became a young lady) was snoring!

The unblemished reputation of the bedroom was dear to Emily, in her capacity of queen. She felt herself humiliated in the presence of the new pupil.

'If that girl ever gets a sweet-heart,' she said indignantly, 'I shall consider it my duty to warn the poor man before he marries her. Her ridiculous name is Euphemia. I have christened her (far more appropriately) Boiled Veal. No colour in her hair, no

colour in her eyes, no colour in her complexion. In short, no flavour in Euphemia. You naturally object to snoring. Pardon me if I turn my back on you. I am going to throw my slipper at her.

The soft voice of Cecilia—suspiciously drowsy in tone—interposed in the interests of mercy.

'She can't help it, poor thing; and she really isn't loud enough to disturb us.'

'She won't disturb *you*, at any rate! Rouse yourself, Cecilia. We are wide awake on this side of the room; and Francine says it's our turn to amuse her.'

A low murmur, dying away gently in a sigh, was the only answer. Sweet Cecilia had yielded to the somnolent influences of the supper and the night. The soft infection of repose seemed to be in some danger of communicating itself to Francine. Her large mouth opened luxuriously in a long-continued yawn.

'Good-night!' said Emily.

Miss de Sor became wide awake in an instant.

'No,' she said positively; 'you are quite mistaken if you think I am going to sleep. Please exert yourself, Miss Emily—I am waiting to be interested.'

Emily appeared to be unwilling to exert herself. She became interested in the weather.

'Isn't the wind rising?' she said.

There could be no doubt of it. The leaves in the garden were beginning to rustle, and the pattering of the rain sounded on the windows.

Francine (as her straight chin proclaimed to all students of physiognomy) was an obstinate girl. Determined to carry her point, she tried Emily's own system on Emily herself—she put questions.

'Have you been long at this school?'

'More than three years.'

'Have you got any brothers and sisters?'

'I am an only child.'

'Are your father and mother alive?'

Emily suddenly raised herself in her bed,

'Wait a minute,' she said; 'I think I hear it again.'

'The creaking on the stairs?'

'Yes.'

Either she was mistaken, or the change for the worse in the weather made it not easy to hear slight noises in the house. The wind was still rising. The passage of it through the great trees in the garden began to sound like the fall of waves on a distant beach. It drove the rain—a heavy downpour by this time—rattling against the windows.

'Almost a storm, isn't it?' Emily said.

Francine's last question had not been answered yet. She took the earliest opportunity of repeating it.

'Never mind the weather,' she said. 'Tell me about your father and mother. Are they both alive?'

Emily's reply only related to one of her parents.

'My mother died before I was old enough to feel my loss.'

'And your father?'

Emily referred to another relative—her father's sister.

'Since I have grown up,' she proceeded, 'my good aunt has been a second mother to me. My story is, in one respect, the reverse of yours. You are unexpectedly rich, and I am unexpectedly poor. My aunt's fortune was to have been my fortune, if I outlived her. She has been ruined by the failure of a bank. In her old age she must live on an in-

come of a hundred a year; and I must get my own living when I leave school.'

'Surely your father can help you?' Francine persisted.

'His property is landed property.' Her voice faltered as she referred to him, even in that indirect manner. 'It is entailed; his nearest male relative inherits it.'

The delicacy which is easily discouraged was not one of the weaknesses in the nature of Francine.

'Do I understand that your father is dead?' she asked.

Our thick-skinned fellow-creatures have the rest of us at their mercy: only give them time, and they carry their point in the end. In sad subdued tones—telling of deeply-rooted reserves of feeling, seldom revealed to strangers—Emily yielded at last.

'Yes,' she said, 'my father is dead.'

'Long ago?'

'Some people might think it long ago. I was very fond of my father. It's nearly four years since he died, and my heart still aches when I think of him. I'm not easily depressed by troubles, Miss de Sor. But his death was sudden—he was in his grave when I first heard of it—and—O, he was so good to me! he was so good to me!'

The gay high-spirited little creature, who took the lead among them all, who was the life and soul of the school, hid her face in her hands, and burst out crying.

Startled and—to do her justice—ashamed, Francine attempted to make excuses. Emily's generous nature passed over the cruel persistency that had tortured her. 'No, no; I have nothing to forgive. It isn't your fault. Other girls have got mothers and brothers and sisters, and get recon-

ciled to such a loss as mine. Don't make excuses.'

'Yes, but I want you to know that I feel for you,' Francine insisted, without the slightest approach to sympathy in face, voice, or manner. 'When my uncle died, and left us all the money, papa was much shocked. He trusted to time to help him.'

'Time has been long about it with me, Francine. I am afraid there is something perverse in my nature; the hope of meeting again in a better world seems so faint and so far away. No more of it now! Let us talk of that good creature who is asleep on the other side of you. Did I tell you that I must earn my own bread when I leave school? Well, Cecilia has written home and found an employment for me. Not a situation as governess—something quite out of the common way. You shall hear all about it.'

In the brief interval that had passed the weather had begun to change again. The wind was as high as ever; but to judge by the lessening patter on the windows the rain was passing away.

Emily began.

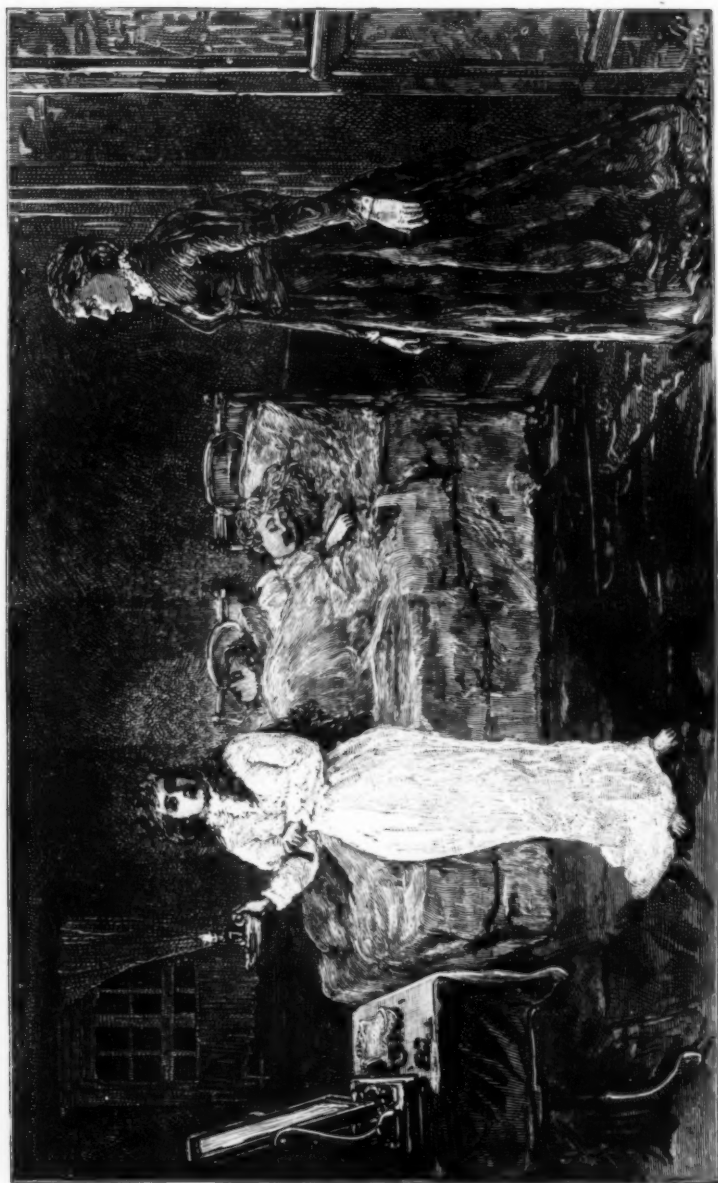
She was too grateful to her friend and schoolfellow, and too deeply interested in her story, to notice the air of indifference with which Francine settled herself on her pillow to hear the praises of Cecilia. The most beautiful girl in the school was not an object of interest to a young lady with an obstinate chin and unfortunately-placed eyes. Pouring warm from the speaker's heart, the story ran smoothly on to the monotonous accompaniment of the moaning wind. By fine degrees, Francine's eyes closed, opened, and closed again. Towards the latter part of the narrative Emily's memory became, for the moment only, confused between two events.

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'A tall woman, robed in a black dressing-gown, stood on the threshold.'

See p. 9.

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She stopped to consider, noticed Francine's silence in an interval when she might have said a word of encouragement, and looked closer at her. Miss de Sor was asleep.

'She might have told me she was tired,' Emily said to herself quietly. 'Well, the best thing I can do is to put out the light and follow her example.'

As she took up the extinguisher the bedroom door was suddenly opened from the outer side. A tall woman, robed in a black dressing-gown, stood on the threshold, looking at Emily.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE LATE MR. BROWN.

THE woman's lean long-fingered hand pointed to the candle.

'Don't put it out.'

Saying these words, she looked round the room, and satisfied herself that the other girls were asleep.

Emily laid down the extinguisher. 'You mean to report us, of course,' she said. 'I am the only one awake, Miss Jethro; lay the blame on me.'

'I have no intention of reporting you. But I have something to say.'

She paused, and pushed her thick black hair (already streaked with gray) back from her temples. Her eyes, large and dark and dim, rested on Emily with a sorrowful interest. 'When your young friends wake to-morrow morning,' she went on, 'you can tell them that the new teacher, whom nobody likes, has left the school.'

For once even quick-witted Emily was bewildered. 'Going away,' she said, 'when you have only been here since Easter!'

Miss Jethro advanced, not

noticing Emily's expression of surprise. 'I am not very strong at the best of times,' she continued; 'may I sit down on your bed?' Remarkable on other occasions for her cold composure, her voice trembled as she made that request—a strange request surely, when there were chairs at her disposal.

Emily made room for her with the dazed look of a girl in a dream. 'I beg your pardon, Miss Jethro; one of the things I can't endure is being puzzled. If you don't mean to report us, why did you come in and catch me with the light?'

Miss Jethro's explanation was far from relieving the perplexity which her conduct had caused.

'I have been mean enough,' she answered, 'to listen at the door, and I heard you talking of your father. I want to hear more about your father. That is why I came in.'

'You knew my father?' Emily exclaimed.

'I believe I knew him; but his name is so common—there are so many thousands of "James Browns" in England—that I am in fear of making a mistake. I heard you say that he died nearly four years since. Can you mention any particulars which might help to enlighten me? If you think I am taking a liberty—'

Emily stopped her. 'I would help you if I could,' she said; 'but I was in poor health at the time, and I was staying with friends far away in Scotland, to try change of air. The news of my father's death brought on a relapse. Weeks passed before I was strong enough to travel—weeks and weeks passed before I saw his grave! I can only tell you what I know from my aunt. He died of heart-complaint.'

Miss Jethro started.

Emily looked at her for the first time, with eyes that betrayed a feeling of distrust. 'What have I said to startle you?' she asked.

'Nothing! I am nervous in stormy weather—don't notice me.' She went on abruptly with her inquiries. 'Will you tell me the date of your father's death?'

'The date was the thirtieth of September, nearly four years since.'

She waited, after that reply.

Miss Jethro was silent.

'And this,' Emily continued, 'is the thirtieth of June, eighteen hundred and eighty-one. You can now judge for yourself. Did you know my father?'

Miss Jethro answered mechanically, using the same words.

'I did know your father.'

Emily's feeling of distrust was not set at rest. 'I never heard him speak of you,' she said.

In her younger days, the teacher must have been a handsome woman. Her grandly-formed features still suggested the idea of imperial beauty—perhaps Jewish in its origin. Not the faintest change had disturbed the composure of her face, until Emily said, 'I never heard him speak of you.' Then the colour flew into her pallid cheeks: her dim eyes became alive again with a momentary light. She left her seat on the bed, and, turning away, mastered the emotion that shook her.

'How hot the night is!' she said; and sighed, and resumed the subject with a steady countenance. 'I'm not surprised that your father never mentioned me—to you.' She said it quietly; but her face was paler than ever. She sat down again on the bed. 'Is there anything I can do for you,' she asked, 'before I go away? O, I only mean some trifling service that would lay you

under no obligation, and would not oblige you to keep up your acquaintance with me.'

Her eyes—the dim black eyes that must once have been irresistibly beautiful—looked at Emily so sadly that the generous girl reproached herself for having doubted her father's friend. 'Are you thinking of him,' she said, gently, 'when you ask if you can be of service to me?'

Miss Jethro made no direct reply. 'You were fond of your father?' she said faintly, in a whisper. 'You told your school-fellow that your heart still aches when you speak of him.'

'I only told her the truth,' Emily answered simply.

Miss Jethro shuddered—on that hot night!—shuddered as if a chill had struck her.

Emily held out her hand: the kind feeling that had been roused in her glittered prettily in her eyes. 'I am afraid I have not done you justice,' she said. 'Will you forgive me and shake hands?'

Miss Jethro rose and drew back. 'Look at the light!' she exclaimed.

The candle was all but burnt out. Emily still offered her hand—and still Miss Jethro refused to see it.

'There is just light enough left,' she said, 'to show me my way to the door. Good-night—and good bye.'

Emily caught at her dress, and stopped her. 'Why won't you shake hands with me?' she asked.

The wick of the candle fell over in the socket, and left them in the dark. Emily resolutely held the teacher's dress. With or without light, she was still bent on making Miss Jethro explain herself.

They had throughout spoken in guarded tones, fearing to disturb the sleeping girls. The sudden

darkness had its inevitable effect. Their voices sank to whispers now. 'My father's friend,' Emily pleaded, 'is surely my friend?'

'Drop the subject.'

'Why?'

'You can never be *my* friend.'

'Why not?'

'Let me go!'

Emily's sense of self-respect forbade her to persist any longer. 'I beg your pardon for having kept you here against your will,' she said; and dropped her hold on the dress.

Miss Jethro instantly yielded on her side. 'I am sorry to have been obstinate,' she answered. 'If you do despise me, it is after all no more than I have deserved.' Her hot breath beat on Emily's face: the unhappy woman must have bent over the bed as she made her confession. 'I am not a fit person for you to associate with.'

'I don't believe it!'

Miss Jethro sighed bitterly.

'Young and warm-hearted—I was once like you!' She controlled that outburst of despair. Her next words were spoken in steadier tones. 'You *will* have it—you *shall* have it!' she said. 'Some one (in this house or out of it; I don't know which) has betrayed me to the mistress of the school. A wretch in my situation suspects everybody, and, worse still, does it without reason or excuse. I heard you girls talking when you ought to have been asleep. You all dislike me. How did I know it mightn't be one of you? Absurd, to a person with a well-balanced mind! I went half-way up the stairs, and felt ashamed of myself, and went back to my room. If I could only have got some rest! Ah, well, it was not to be done. My own vile suspicions kept me awake; I left my bed again. You know

what I heard on the other side of that door, and why I was interested in hearing it. Your father never told me he had a daughter. "Miss Brown" at this school was any "Miss Brown" to me; I had no idea of who you really were until to-night. I'm wandering. What does all this matter to you? Miss Ladd has been merciful; she lets me go without exposing me. You can guess what has happened. No! Not even yet? Is it innocence or kindness that makes you so slow to understand? My dear, I have obtained admission to this respectable house by means of false references, and I have been discovered. *Now* you know why you must not be the friend of such a woman as I am! Once more, good-night—and good-bye!'

Emily shrank from that miserable farewell. 'Bid me good-night,' she said, 'but don't bid me good-bye. Let me see you again.'

'Never!'

The sound of the softly-closed door was just audible in the darkness. She had spoken; she had gone, never to be seen by Emily again.

Miserable, interesting, unfathomable creature—the problem that night of Emily's waking thoughts, the phantom of her dreams. 'Bad? or good?' she asked herself. 'False; for she listened at the door. True; for she told me the tale of her own disgrace. A friend of my father; and she never knew that he had a daughter. Refined, accomplished, lady-like; and she stoops to use a false reference. Who is to reconcile such contradictions as these?'

Dawn looked in at the window—dawn of the memorable day which was, for Emily, the beginning of a new life. The years

were before her; and the years in their course reveal baffling mysteries of life and death.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### MISS LADD'S DRAWING-MASTER.

FRANCINE was awakened the next morning by one of the housemaids, bringing up her breakfast on a tray. Astonished at this concession to laziness, in an institution devoted to the practice of all the virtues, she looked round. The bedroom was deserted.

'The other young ladies are as busy as bees, miss,' the housemaid explained. 'They were up and dressed two hours ago; and the breakfast has been cleared away long since. It's Miss Emily's fault. She wouldn't allow them to wake you; she said you could be of no possible use down-stairs, and you had better be treated like a visitor. Miss Cecilia was so distressed at your missing your breakfast that she spoke to the housekeeper, and I was sent up to you. Please to excuse it if the tea's cold. This is Grand Day, and we are all topsy-turvy in consequence.'

Inquiring what 'Grand Day' meant, and why it produced this extraordinary result in a ladies' school, Francine discovered that the first day of the vacation was devoted to the distribution of prizes, in the presence of parents, guardians, and friends. An Entertainment was added, comprising those merciless tests of human endurance called Recitations; light refreshments and musical performances being distributed at intervals, to encourage the exhausted audience. The local newspaper sent a reporter to describe the proceedings, and some of Miss Ladd's young ladies enjoyed the

intoxicating luxury of seeing their names in print.

'It begins at three o'clock,' the housemaid went on; 'and, what with practising and rehearsing, and ornamenting the school-room, there's a hubbub fit to make a person's head spin. Besides which,' said the girl, lowering her voice, and approaching a little nearer to Francine, 'we have all been taken by surprise. The first thing in the morning Miss Jethro left us, without saying good-bye to anybody.'

'Who is Miss Jethro?'

'The new teacher, miss. We none of us liked her, and we all suspect there's something wrong. Miss Ladd and the clergyman had a long talk together yesterday (in private, you know), and they sent for Miss Jethro, which looks bad, doesn't it? Is there anything more I can do for you, miss? It's a beautiful day, after the rain. If I was you, I should go and enjoy myself in the garden.'

Having finished her breakfast, Francine decided on profiting by this sensible suggestion.

The servant, who showed her the way to the garden, was not favourably impressed by the new pupil. Francine's temper asserted itself a little too plainly in her face. To a girl possessing a high opinion of her own importance it was not very agreeable to feel herself excluded, as an illiterate stranger, from the one absorbing interest of her schoolfellows.

'Will the time ever come,' she wondered bitterly, 'when I shall win a prize, and sing and play before all the company? How I should enjoy making the girls envy me!'

A broad lawn, overshadowed at one end by fine old trees, flower-beds and shrubberies, and winding paths prettily and invitingly laid out, made the garden a wel-

come refuge on that fine summer morning. The novelty of the scene, after her experience in the West Indies, the delicious breezes, cooled by the rain of the night, exerted their cheering influence even on the sullen disposition of Francine. She smiled, in spite of herself, as she followed the pleasant paths and heard the birds singing their summer songs over her head.

Wandering among the trees, which occupied a considerable extent of ground, she passed into an open space beyond, and discovered an old fish-pond, overgrown by aquatic plants. Dribblets of water trickled from a dilapidated fountain in the middle. On the farther side of the pond the ground sloped downwards towards the south, and revealed, over a low paling, a pretty view of a village and its church, backed by fir woods mounting the heathy sides of a range of hills beyond. A fanciful little wooden building, imitating the form of a Swiss cottage, was placed so as to command the prospect. Near it, in the shadow of the building, stood a rustic chair and table, with a colour-box on one and a portfolio on the other. Fluttering over the grass, at the mercy of the capricious breeze, was a neglected sheet of drawing-paper. Francine ran round the pond, and picked up the paper just as it was on the point of being tilted into the water. It contained a sketch in water-colours of the village and the woods. Francine had looked at the view itself with indifference; the picture of the view interested her. Ordinary visitors to Galleries of Art, which admit students, show the same strange perversity. The work of the copyist commands their whole attention: they take no interest in the original picture.

Looking up from the sketch, Francine was startled. She discovered a man at the window of the Swiss summer-house, watching her.

'When you have done with that drawing,' he said quietly, 'please let me have it back again.'

He was tall and thin and dark. His finely-shaped intelligent face—hidden, as to the lower part of it, by a curly black beard—would have been absolutely handsome, even in the eyes of a school-girl, but for the deep furrows that marked it prematurely between the eyebrows and at the sides of the mouth. In the same way, an underlying mockery impaired the attraction of his otherwise refined and gentle manner. Among his fellow-creatures, children and dogs were the only critics who appreciated his merits, without discovering the defects which lessened the favourable appreciation of him by men and women. He dressed neatly, but his morning coat was badly made, and his picturesque felt hat was too old. In short, there seemed to be no good quality about him which was not perversely associated with a drawback of some kind. He was one of those harmless and luckless men, possessed of excellent qualities, who fail nevertheless to achieve popularity in their social sphere.

Francine handed his sketch to him through the window; doubtful whether the words that he had addressed to her were spoken in jest or in earnest.

'I only presumed to touch your drawing,' she said, 'because it was in danger.'

'What danger?' he inquired.

Francine pointed to the pond. 'If I had not been in time to pick it up, it would have been blown into the water.'

'Do you think it was worth picking up?'

Putting that question, he looked first at the sketch, then at the view which it represented, then back again at the sketch. The corners of his mouth turned upwards with a humorous expression of scorn. 'Madam Nature,' he said, 'I beg your pardon.' With those words, he composedly tore his work of art into small pieces, and scattered them out of the window.

'What a pity!' said Francine.

He joined her on the ground outside the cottage. 'Why is it a pity?' he asked.

'Such a nice drawing.'

'It isn't a nice drawing.'

'You're not very polite, sir.'

He looked at her—and sighed, as if he pitied so young a woman for having a temper so ready to take offence. In his flattest contradictions he always preserved the character of a politely-positive man.

'Put it in plain words, Miss,' he replied. 'I have offended the predominant sense in your nature—your sense of self-esteem. You don't like to be told, even indirectly, that you know nothing of Art. In these days everybody knows everything, and thinks nothing worth knowing, after all. But beware how you presume on an appearance of indifference, which is nothing but conceit in disguise. The ruling passion of civilised humanity is, Conceit. You may try the regard of your dearest friend in any other way, and be forgiven. Ruffle the smooth surface of your friend's self-esteem—and there will be an unacknowledged coolness between you which will last for life. Excuse me for giving you the benefit of my trumpery experience. This sort of smart talk is *my* form of conceit. Can I be of use to you

in some better way? Are you looking for one of our young ladies?'

Francine began to feel a certain reluctant interest in him when he spoke of 'our young ladies.' She asked if he belonged to the school.

The corners of his mouth turned up again. 'I'm one of the masters,' he said. 'Are you going to belong to the school, too?'

Francine bent her head with a gravity and condescension intended to keep him at his proper distance. Far from being discouraged, he permitted his curiosity to take additional liberties. 'Are you to have the misfortune of being one of my pupils?' he asked.

'I don't know who you are.'

'You won't be much wiser when you do know. My name is Alban Morris.'

Francine corrected herself. 'I mean, I don't know what you teach.'

Alban Morris pointed to the fragments of his sketch from Nature. 'I am a bad artist,' he said. 'Some bad artists become Royal Academicians. Some take to drink. Some get a pension. And some—I am one of them—find refuge in schools. Drawing is an "Extra" at this school. Will you take my advice? Spare your good father's pocket; say you don't want to learn to draw.'

He was so gravely in earnest that Francine burst out laughing. 'You are a strange man,' she said.

'Wrong again, Miss. I am only an unhappy man.'

The furrows in his face deepened, the latent humour died out of his eyes. He turned to the summer-house window, and took up a pipe and tobacco-pouch, left on the ledge.

'I lost my only friend last



year,' he said. 'Since the death of my dog, my pipe is the one companion I have left. Naturally, I am not allowed to enjoy the honest fellow's society in the presence of ladies. They have their own tastes in perfumes. Their clothes and their letters reek with the foetid secretion of the musk-deer. The clean vegetable smell of tobacco is unendurable to them. Allow me to retire, and let me thank you for the trouble you took to save my drawing.'

The tone of indifference in which he expressed his gratitude piqued Francine. She resented it by drawing her own conclusion from what he had said of the ladies and the musk-deer. 'I was wrong in admiring your drawing,' she said; 'and wrong again in thinking you a strange man. Am I wrong, for the third time, in believing that you dislike women?'

'I am sorry to say you are right,' Alban Morris answered gravely.

'Is there not even one exception?'

The instant the words passed her lips, she saw that there was some secretly sensitive feeling in him which she had hurt. His black brows gathered into a frown, his piercing eyes looked at her with angry surprise. It was over in a moment. He raised his shabby hat, and made her a bow.

'There is a sore place still left in me,' he said; 'and you have innocently hit it. Good-morning.'

Before she could speak again, he had turned the corner of the summer-house, and was lost to view in a shrubbery on the westward side of the grounds.

## CHAPTER V.

### DISCOVERIES IN THE GARDEN.

LEFT by herself, Miss de Sor turned back again by way of the trees.

So far her interview with the drawing-master had helped to pass the time. Some girls might have found it no easy task to arrive at a true view of the character of Alban Morris. Francine's essentially superficial observation set him down as 'a little mad,' and left him there, judged and dismissed to her own entire satisfaction.

Arriving at the lawn, she discovered Emily pacing backwards and forwards, with her head down and her hands behind her, deep in thought. Francine's high opinion of herself would have carried her past any of the other girls, unless they had made special advances to her. She stopped and looked at Emily.

It is the sad fate of little women in general to grow too fat, and to be born with short legs. Emily's slim finely-strung figure spoke for itself as to the first of these misfortunes, and asserted its happy freedom from the second, if she only walked across a room. Nature had built her, from head to foot, on a skeleton scaffolding in perfect proportion. Tall or short matters little to the result, in women who possess the first and foremost advantage of beginning well in their bones. When they live to old age, they often astonish thoughtless men, who walk behind them in the street. 'I give you my honour, she was as easy and upright as a young girl; and when you got in front of her, and looked—white hair, and seventy years of age!'

Francine approached Emily, moved by a rare impulse in her nature—the impulse to be soci-

able. 'You look out of spirits,' she remarked. 'Surely you don't regret leaving school?'

In her present mood, Emily took the opportunity (in the popular phrase) of snubbing Francine. 'You have guessed wrong; I do regret,' she answered. 'I have found in Cecilia my dearest friend, at school. And school brought with it the change in my life which has helped me to bear the loss of my father. If you must know what I was thinking of just now, I was thinking of my aunt. She has not answered my last letter—and I am beginning to be afraid she is ill. If you find me in poor spirits, that is the reason.'

'I'm very sorry,' said Francine.

'Why? You don't know my aunt; and you have only known me since yesterday afternoon. Why are you sorry?'

Francine remained silent. Without realising it, she was beginning to feel the dominant influence that Emily exercised over the weaker natures that came in contact with her. To find herself irresistibly attracted by a stranger at a new school—an unfortunate little creature, whose destiny was to earn her own living—filled the narrow mind of Miss de Sor with perplexity. Having waited in vain for a reply, Emily turned away, and resumed the train of thought which her schoolfellow had interrupted.

By an association of ideas, of which she was not herself aware, she now passed from thinking of her aunt to thinking of Miss Jethro. The interview of the previous night had dwelt on her mind at intervals, in the hours of the new day.

Acting on instinct rather than on reason, she had kept that remarkable incident in her school-life a secret from every one. No

discoveries had been made by other persons. In speaking to her staff of teachers, Miss Ladd had alluded to the affair in the most cautious terms. 'Circumstances of a private nature have obliged the lady to retire from my school. When we meet after the holidays another teacher will be in her place.' There, Miss Ladd's explanation had begun and ended. Inquiries addressed to the servants had led to no result. Miss Jethro's luggage was to be forwarded to the London terminus of the railway, and Miss Jethro herself had baffled investigation by leaving the school on foot. Emily's interest in the lost teacher was not the transitory interest of curiosity: her father's mysterious friend was a person whom she honestly desired to see again. Perplexed by the difficulty of finding a means of tracing Miss Jethro, she reached the shady limit of the trees, and turned to walk back again. Approaching the place at which she and Francine had met, an idea occurred to her. It was just possible that Miss Jethro might not be unknown to her aunt.

Still meditating on the cold reception that she had encountered, and still feeling the influence which mastered her in spite of herself, Francine looked up, and saw Emily approaching. The sense of injury, strong as it was, failed to sustain her. For the first time in her life she was ready to forgive. Interpreting Emily's return as an implied expression of regret, she advanced with a constrained smile, and spoke first.

'How are the young ladies getting on in the schoolroom?' she asked, by way of renewing the conversation.

Emily's face assumed a look of surprise, which said plainly, 'Can't

you take a hint, and leave me to myself?

Francine was constitutionally impenetrable to reproof of this sort: her thick skin was not even tickled. 'Why are you not helping them,' she went on; 'you, who have the clearest head among us, and take the lead in everything?'

It may be a humiliating confession to make, yet it is surely true that we are all accessible to flattery. Different tastes appreciate different methods of burning incense—but the perfume is more or less agreeable to all varieties of noses. Francine's method had its tranquillising effect on Emily. She answered indulgently, 'My dear, I have nothing to do with it.'

'Nothing to do with it? No prizes to win before you leave school?'

'I won all the prizes—years ago.'

'But there are recitations. Surely, you recite?'

Harmless words in themselves, pursuing the same smooth course of flattery as before, but with what a different result! Emily's face reddened with anger the moment they were spoken. Having already irritated Alban Morris, unlucky Francine, by a second mischievous interposition of accident, had succeeded in making Emily smart next. 'Who has told you?' she burst out; 'I insist on knowing!'

'Nobody has told me anything.' Francine declared piteously.

'Nobody has told you how I have been insulted?'

'No, indeed! O, my dear, who could insult you?'

In a man, the sense of injury does sometimes submit to the discipline of silence; in a woman—never. Suddenly reminded of her past wrongs (by the pardonable error of a polite schoolfellow),

Emily committed the startling inconsistency of appealing to the sympathies of Francine!

'Would you believe it! I have been forbidden to recite—I, the head girl of the school! O, not to-day. It happened a month ago—when we were all in consultation making our arrangements. Miss Ladd asked me if I had decided on a piece to recite. I said, "I have not only decided, I have learnt the piece." "And what may it be?" "The dagger-scene in *Macbeth*." There was a howl—I can call it by no other name—a howl of indignation. A man's soliloquy, and, worse still, a murdering man's soliloquy, recited by one of Miss Ladd's young ladies, before an audience of parents and guardians! That was the tone they took with me. I was as firm as a rock. The dagger-scene or nothing. The result is—nothing! An insult to Shakespeare, and an insult to Me. I felt it—I feel it still. I was prepared for any sacrifice in the cause of the drama. If Miss Ladd had met me in a proper spirit, do you know what I would have done? I would have played *Macbeth* in costume. Just hear me, and judge for yourself. I begin with a dreadful vacancy in my eyes, and a hollow moaning of my voice: "Is this a dagger that I see before me—?"'

Reciting with her face towards the trees, Emily started, dropped the character of *Macbeth*, and instantly became herself again: herself, with a rising colour and an angry brightening of the eyes. 'Excuse me; I can't trust my memory: I must get the play.' With that abrupt apology, she walked away rapidly in the direction of the house.

In some surprise Francine turned, and looked at the trees. She discovered—in full retreat,

side—the eccentric drawing-master, Alban Morris.

Did he, too, admire the dagger-scene? And was he modestly desirous of hearing it recited without showing himself? In that case why should Emily (whose besetting weakness was certainly not want of confidence in her own resources) leave the garden the moment she caught sight of him? Francine consulted her instincts. She had just arrived at a conclusion which expressed itself outwardly by a malicious smile, when gentle Cecilia appeared on the lawn—a lovable object in a broad straw hat and a white dress, with a nosegay in her bosom—smiling and fanning herself.

'It's so hot in the schoolroom,' she said; 'and some of the girls, poor things, are so ill-tempered at rehearsal, I have made my escape. I hope you got your breakfast, Miss de Sor. What have you been doing here, all by yourself?'

'I have been making an interesting discovery,' Francine replied.

'An interesting discovery, in our garden? What *can* it be?'

'The drawing-master, my dear, is in love with Emily. Perhaps she doesn't care about him; or perhaps I have been an innocent obstacle in the way of an appointment between them.'

Cecilia had breakfasted to her heart's content on her favourite dish—buttered eggs. She was in such good spirits that she was inclined to be coquettish, even when there was no man present to fascinate. 'We are not allowed to talk about love in this school,' she said, and hid her face behind her fan. 'Besides, if it came to Miss Ladd's ears, poor Mr. Morris might lose his situation.'

'But isn't it true?' asked Francine.

'It may be true, my dear; but nobody knows. Emily hasn't breathed a word about it to any of us; and Mr. Morris keeps his own secret. Now and then we catch him looking at her; and we draw our own conclusions.'

'Did you meet Emily on your way here?'

'Yes, and she passed without speaking to me.'

'Thinking, perhaps, of Mr. Morris.'

Cecilia shook her head. 'Thinking, Francine, of the new life before her, and regretting, I am afraid, that she ever confided her hopes and wishes to me. Did she tell you last night what her prospects are when she leaves school?'

'She told me you had been very kind in helping her. I dare say I should have heard more if I had not fallen asleep. What is she going to do?'

'To live in a dull house, far away in the north,' Cecilia answered, 'with only old people in it. She will have to write and translate for a great scholar, who is studying mysterious inscriptions—hieroglyphics I think they are called—found among the ruins of Central America. It's really no laughing matter, Francine! Emily made a joke of it, too. "I'll take anything but a situation as governess," she said; "the children who have me to teach them would be to be pitied indeed!" She begged and prayed me to help her to get an honest living. What could I do? I could only write home to papa. He is a member of Parliament; and everybody who wants a place seems to think he is bound to find it for them. As it happened, he had heard from an old friend of his (a certain Sir Jervis Redwood), who was in search of a secretary. Being in favour of

letting the women compete for employment with the men, Sir Jervis was willing to try, what he calls, "a female." Isn't that a horrid way of speaking of us? and Miss Ladd says it's ungrammatical, besides. Papa had written back to say he knew of no lady whom he could recommend. When he got my letter, speaking of Emily, he kindly wrote again. In the interval, Sir Jervis had received two applications for the vacant place. They were both from old ladies; and he declined to employ them.'

'Because they were old,' Francine suggested maliciously.

'You shall hear him give his own reasons, my dear. Papa sent me an extract from his letter. It made me rather angry; and (perhaps for that reason) I think I can repeat it word for word: "We are four old people in this house, and we don't want a fifth. Let us have a young one to cheer us. If your daughter's friend likes the terms, and is not encumbered with a sweetheart, I will send for her when the school breaks up at midsummer." Coarse and selfish—isn't it? However, Emily didn't agree with me, when I showed her the extract. She accepted the place, very much to her aunt's surprise and regret, when that excellent person heard of it. Now that the time has come (though Emily won't acknowledge it), I believe she secretly shrinks, poor dear, from the prospect.'

'Very likely,' Francine agreed, without even a pretence of sympathy. 'But tell me, who are the four old people?'

'First, Sir Jervis himself—seventy last birthday; next, his unmarried sister—nearly eighty; next, his manservant, Mr. Rook—well past sixty; and last, his manservant's wife, who considers

herself young, being only a little over forty. That is the household. Mrs. Rook is coming to-day to attend Emily on the journey to the North; and I am not at all sure that Emily will like her.'

'A disagreeable woman, I suppose?'

'No—not exactly that; rather odd and flighty. The fact is, Mrs. Rook has had her troubles; and perhaps they have a little unsettled her. She and her husband used to keep the village inn close to our park: we know all about them at home. I am sure I pity these poor people. What are you looking at, Francine?'

Feeling no sort of interest in Mr. and Mrs. Rook, Francine was studying her schoolfellow's lovely face in search of defects. She had already discovered that Cecilia's eyes were placed too widely apart, and that her chin wanted size and character.

'I was admiring your complexion, dear,' she answered coolly. 'Well, and why do you pity the Rooks?'

Simple Cecilia smiled, and went on with her story.

'They are obliged to go out to service in their old age, through a misfortune for which they are in no way to blame. Their customers deserted the inn, and Mr. Rook became bankrupt. The inn got what they call a bad name—in a very dreadful way. There was a murder committed in the house.'

'A murder?' cried Francine. 'O, this is exciting! You provoking girl, why didn't you tell me about it before?'

'I didn't think of it,' said Cecilia placidly.

'Do go on! Were you at home when it happened?'

'I was here, at school.'

'You saw the newspapers, I suppose?'

'Miss Ladd doesn't allow us to read newspapers. I did hear of it, however, in letters from home. Not that there was much in the letters. They said it was too horrible to be described. The poor murdered gentleman—'

Francine was unaffectedly shocked. 'A gentleman !' she exclaimed. 'How dreadful !'

'The poor man was a stranger in our part of the country,' Cecilia resumed ; 'and the police were puzzled about the motive for a murder. His pocket-book was missing ; but his watch and his rings were found on the body. I remember the initials on his linen because they were the same

as my mother's initials before she was married—"J. B." Really, Francine, that's all I know about it.'

'Surely you know whether the murderer was discovered ?'

'O yes—of course I know that. The Government offered a reward ; and clever people were sent from London to help the county police. Nothing came of it. The murderer has never been discovered from that time to this.'

'When did it happen ?'

'It happened in the autumn.'

'The autumn of last year ?'

'No ! no ! Nearly four years since.'

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*(To be continued.)*

## GETTING OUR DAUGHTERS OFF OUR HANDS.

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'GETTING our daughters off our hands' means one thing only, namely, getting them on to some one else's hands; in other words, it means taking advantage of what some wit termed 'an insane desire in men to undertake the keep of some one else's daughter.' We once heard a child observe, 'Papa says there are too many of us. If I were papa, I'd take some of them out into the streets and lose them.'

But there is one way only that papa, or rather mamma, with full-grown daughters has, as yet, discovered for a quittance, and a way so natural and congenial that nearly all the female population have their minds running on one and the same thing; for though marriage is not everything to a man, it seems to be the all in all to woman. Nature betrays this truth very soon. While the boy plays with horses and whips, the little girl from her earliest years enacts maternity with a doll. The same child at years of (so-called) discretion, herself a mother, soon begins to meditate on marriage for her daughters.

As to a small estate in daughters, though generally accounted chief among this world's blessings, one would think instead of blessings, they were blisters, if we may judge from the lifelong earnestness of the mother to get rid of them. No sooner are girls old enough to be companionable, and in some way to repay the mother for having run over a painful and anxious gamut of teething, rickets, measles, and all other infantile complaints, and having them danc-

ed, musicked, Frenched, Mangnall's Questioned, and with a long list of extras utterly bewildering in every school-bill—than the mother dreams of some county man with house, establishment, horses and carriages, and perhaps a regiment of donkeys and nursery-maids—not to mention the pleasure in prospect of going to visit and feeling pride in her own dear child, with no little triumph over neighbours whose girls hang still on hand, and no less self-gratulation on her own tact as a female 'judicious hooker.'

There is much in life both to prompt and to excuse all this maternal intrigue. Various things combine to urge the anxious parent on.

First of all, society combines to discourage celibacy, and to cry up matrimony. Those who are happily wedded flaunt rather invidiously their conjugal degree in your face! and those less happily assorted seem, like the curtailed fox in the fable, to conceal their own mishap, as if they desired to lead on others into the same scrape. Then the married take precedence in society: the bride is of admitted importance on her first reappearance, and makes the most of it; and as to the airs they give themselves when the baby comes, Charles Lamb observes it is past all bearing. 'If,' he says, 'there were any rarity in the matter, or anything so peculiar in a pack of brats, it were different; but when every blind alley swarms with them, and the more dirty and destitute people are the more they seem to



have them, they might say less about it.'

Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*, seems of the same opinion. He says: "'Of all the riddles of a married life,'" said my father, crossing the landing in order to set his back against the wall while he propounded it to my uncle Toby—"of all the puzzling riddles," said he, "in the marriage state—of which you may trust me, brother Toby, there are more asses' loads than all Job's stock of asses could have carried—there is not one that hath more intricacies in it than this—that from the very moment the mistress of the house is brought to bed, every female in it, from my lady's gentlewoman down to the cinder wench, becomes an inch taller for it, and gives herself more airs in that single inch than all her other inches put together."

But the greatest spur to match-making mammas is one more of the solid than the sentimental kind. As they sum up their weekly bills they may say with King Lear, 'These are no flatterers, but feelingly remind me what I am.' The sons may have professions, and can depend, to some extent, upon themselves; but the daughters of a family are resourceless—must depend on some one else. The family income, when divided, and placed in safe investments—so called, we suppose, because safe to bring in very little interest—the poor mother reflects will 'leave them poor indeed;' so no time is to be lost. Cinderella in her gilded coach, and many a girl in later times escaping the prospect of a garret by being carried off by some wealthy knight to his castle or his mansion, keep the prizes of the matrimonial market always before the mother's eyes. But the market, she knows, is limited, so no

chance must be thrown away. To ship girls off to India—once a good spec—is now rarely worth the outfit and their passage; it was proved too often to encumber some poor relative for a season, and after all to have them shipped back again; for the Suez Canal brings, with three months' leave of absence, romantic youths home for a wider choice.

The poorest lady, however, is never quite without hope; there may be many blanks in the matrimonial lottery, but every day announces a prize drawn by some one. Hence the sums squandered, but ill-afforded, on dress. Who gives up dress gives up hope. Dress alone commands the ticket, and is, therefore, so often in excess of a lady's income—a very favourite form of female speculation, and not a bad investment either. An old shopman of long experience in Messrs. —'s establishment said it was a lesson in life to stand behind their counter or in their dress-room, and hear the remarks of young ladies and their mammas.

'O mamma! I could not have anything as poor as that! Miss A. and Emily B. will be at the ball, and with their lace and satin, how can I face them in this poor muslin? Why, they call that kind of makeshift "the refuge for the destitute!"'

Now balls, the grander the better, are always in favour for 'bringing out;' and not only so, but they enter most largely into the maternal mind for what they call 'introducing their daughters;' that is, to speak rather plainly, the best investment in the way of announcing and advertising a young lady as on her preferment—reminding us of the lady who forgot to remove a shop-ticket from a cheap shawl, and walked away with 'Going at a tremendous

sacrifice; no reasonable offer will be refused.'

But in comparing notes with old friends over an experience of fifty years—during which we had seen belles degenerate into frights, and even plain girls become nice-looking old women—we all agreed that we had seen the least of what is called 'success' to be traced to ballroom introductions.

The county ball used to be a great event, quite a crisis in a young lady's history. The talk of the county was that some Miss De Meanour was emancipated from her governess, or the governess had a deliverance from Miss De Meanour; that ladies, old and young, had been to inspect the ball-dress; and that, doubtless, she would make as great a sensation as the bride in a modern assembly. The mother was proud who sailed into the room on the long wished-for day flanked by some fine daughters; and even the matron who had none of her own, deemed her importance no less magnified if she could display as fine a female retinue, though only invited for the occasion to Stuckup Hall, ostensibly for the girl's good, but really for her own.

Before railway days, all but the richest in the county had to depend on their own county circle. The landed interests were like the Athenian Autochthones, sons of the soil, with almost a Darwinian pedigree and development. Then everybody knew everybody in the room; there was little of that mixture which required red cords to separate the county people from the town people, lest they should pass 'betwixt the wind and their nobility,' and when quadrilles required tact and contrivance to preserve an exclusive character. In those days for-

tunes had not been so generally spent or estates mortgaged; the race of men in marriageable circumstances was not so nearly extinct; and, therefore, a young lady had less occasion for compromise, and to take, not the gentleman she would prefer, but the best she could afford.

In those days there was truth in the saying, 'Thrice a bridesmaid never a bride,' because a girl who had to play the looker-on so long must have been wanting in charms to have had no suitable offer. The philosopher of old said he would rather have for his daughter 'the man without the money than the money without the man;' but all this applied to far more primitive times. Matrimony was not then a *matter of money* to an extent quite unsentimental, as at present. Many a mother in a London season goes in for a certain price, or, at least, a certain style of establishment. The sporting advertisement of Hyde Park Corner finds its echo all down Belgravia, 'She is the best blood in England, and she is to be sold!' Even the sharpers of Crockford's were not more keen in pursuit of the young lord who had just succeeded to his estate than were the old dowagers of Almack's. One who had for several years stood this female siege, and at last astonished all his side of the county by taking home some poor gentleman's daughter of name unknown, confessed that at once the charm and the surprise was to have found a lady who did not run after him, but required the usual complimentary wooing and pursuit.

In France the parents make the match. If not as ostensibly, yet no less really, is this often done in England. It is not the man, but the maintenance, which is uppermost in the parental thoughts.

It is painful to reflect, while taking a survey of the matches of fifty years' experience, how rarely we ever could detect that the character of a man, otherwise eligible, influenced the parental decision. For the most part, all the evidence offered of a man being a scamp or a profligate is set aside as envy, malice, and all uncharitableness; or else with the remark, 'Well, all young men are wild; but they grow steady when they are married.' We once heard a lady, in speaking of a matrimonial event just coming off, say, 'Capital match; first-rate chance for Ellen. Not at all the sort of man, we all know, that she ever intended to marry; but not one woman in twenty does get that.' Certainly, in this men have an advantage, for they can choose: the ladies must submit to be chosen, save in the case of some remarkable belle, who has admirers at command. But these advantages on the side of the gentlemen are less than they seem. Their choice is anything but free, as far as reason is concerned. They are the victims of a natural illusion. They choose from the charm and fancy of the hour, or the pride of possessing some Lady Clara Vere de Vere, or some simpering dimpled doll; while all companionable qualities, and that sunshine of the heart which relieves the darkest, while it adds warmth to the brightest days of this chequered life, are rarely even named among men as the motive of their choice. Truly 'marriage is the door that leads deluded mortals back to earth;' and, as with many a pretty bargain that has caught our fancy in a shop-window, great is the disenchantment when we have brought it home. Dr. Johnson, in that charming book *Rasselas*—the only little book of all the

doctor's works which is ever likely to be often republished—says, with regard to the little part in which prudence is commonly concerned in the choice of a partner for life: 'Two young persons thrown together by chance, or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, and go home and dream of each other. Finding themselves rather uncomfortable apart, they think they necessarily must be happy together;' but find out, too late, that from diversity of tastes, feelings, and pursuits, they are rather paired than matched, with habits about as well suited to each other as those of a bird and a fish.

Now to practices so common as to be universal in all ages and countries, it is quite reasonable to apply a well-known maxim of philosophy, that it is a proof such practices are founded in Nature. As Virgil says of weeds and thistles and such difficulties to the farmer, Nature never intended that the path should be so smooth and easy—Providence never intended that prudence should have so much away at this critical moment of a man's life; otherwise all the good and wise would come together, and leave, with little hope of mutual improvement, a sad residuum of knaves and fools. It is better as it is; for now the wiser may correct the worse. Some Mr. Soda may be guided by a blind instinct to select a Miss Acid, and, after some little preliminary ebullitions, may eventually correct her natural acidity. Why otherwise should Providence close a poor mortal's eyes so generally at the very moment he most requires to use them?

Our experience with engaged couples is not slight, and we can truly say that from the hour their troth is plighted, they have ever

seemed to us to require not only a chaperon, but a keeper. They really are hardly sane; nor is there anything so rash or imprudent that, but for the care of friends, the lady would not do at the request of her dear George or beloved Thomas. We have known a silly girl inveigled into a Registrar's office, and, as a mere betrothal of little importance, made the wife of a scamp, who thus became possessed of all her yet unsettled fortune. Widows, in spite of their experience, having less frequently friends to interfere, have 'managed for themselves,' and therefore become, more often than spinsters, the dupes of adventurers.

But men are too often dupes too. There are adventuresses as well as adventurers, not least in high life, when high life is tottering to its fall, and needs some timely support and cannot afford to be particular.

The following is a common occurrence. Our friend Edward Wilson, whose father had flourished in Manchester, and given his son an Oxford education, had from these civilising associations of Eton and Christchurch become quite on a level with ordinary good society, when he unexpectedly succeeded to a fortune of 10,000*l.* a year. Of course this was soon well known to his old Oxford friends and friends' friends at every hunt and every county ball.

A rich man's circle soon enlarges. Nothing is more easily to be bought, if paid for, than a certain sort of high society, and soon his circle had extended to a circle of lords and ladies, previously high above his own. Soon the match-makers 'marked him as their own.' Even among his male friends he had occasionally such invitations as this, 'Come

and see me, and have some shooting, and I will introduce you to a very nice girl.' This, however, was exceptional; young men are not match-makers by nature; but when once he had become a frequent guest at great houses he soon saw—being more than usually wideawake—that he was the pigeon to be plucked. Some dowager at last contrived to seat herself by his side, and after sundry little preliminary trifles to conceal her real intentions, she flattered him by saying that he seemed to have too little confidence in himself, and she could assure him that Lord A. and Lady B. were exceedingly interested in him; nor did she doubt that even if an alliance were desired, one who could command as fine a park and high county position as his fortune could secure him would not be refused as proposing an unequal match.

Our friend replied that soon after coming into his fortune he had been kindly cautioned that there were always some families very high, with bankers' balances very low, who would be but too pleased to take in a wealthy commoner as a kind of refresher. In which case, perhaps, the lady would keep her title, and stipulate not even to be degraded by the gentleman's name. Mr. Wilson had heard of couples like Lady Emily Spender and Mr. Payall, not a little puzzling to unsophisticated landlords of hotels and lodgings, who were particular about their proper company. He was aware that the lady's circle would condescend to pass a kind of Toleration Act, and he should be endured much on the terms of 'the man in possession,' who is willing to make himself useful, but at the same time be the subject of frequent jokes, as Lady Emily and her Paymaster-general,

or perhaps her Relieving officer. He had no wish to purchase the *entrée* to high society on such humiliating terms.

The dowager was surprised to find Mr. Wilson had been so well informed, and said little more to him; but, probably returning to the knot of ladies awaiting the result, reported with schoolgirl's French, '*Point de aller,*' or 'No go!'

More commonly the result is different. A rich Jewess will make a handsome settlement for a title, and a rich brewer, whose genealogical tree is a mere stump, will do the same, blushing whenever he sees his name on his own bottles, or, worse still, on every public-house, inwardly wishing '*Honi soit qui malt y pense.*' Of course these dupes soon find out their mistake, being among the aristocracy, but not of them—as Lord Bacon said, 'Like the iron and the clay in the toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which mix together but don't incorporate.'

The married ladies in the ball-room are the pests of the poor mammas. They have attained the object of all balls and dancing, and yet they have not the grace to feel for and give place to young girls who sit in rows against the wall. Men prefer the married women, and why? They can indulge in a kind of conversation at which we should hope that, in spite of French novels, the single would turn away. It is strange that the husbands should endure to see their wives whisked and whirled and dragged about, well knowing that the so-called waltzing and galopading always, unless unusually well done, degenerates into little better than unseemly romping: indeed, no one would believe even in its innocence if seen, where we seriously believe it would not be tolerated, in a Picca-

dilly saloon. A fact: a dress-maker who had seen from an orchestra the dancing now in fashion, when asked by a lady, next day, how she had been entertained, replied, 'I suppose it is all right in high life, but in our line of life no young men would dare to take such liberties with young women.' No, madam, your daughter's prospects never can be the better for being exposed to such scenes as these, least of all in the now fashionable costume of a skirt and a pair of shoulder-straps. It is not the sensuous, but the sentimental, that should prevail. The free and easy dancer, not the graceful young lady of proper dignity and self-respect, takes the lead in a modern ball-room, and foolish it is for the really modest and reserved to compete in such a sphere. Granted, they may enjoy it, and you may enjoy it too. If so, be happy in your own way. Only, for 'introducing' your daughters, and looking to the main chance, we cannot recommend such society.

Fast young ladies—so called, we suppose, because they go beyond the regulation pace after the gentlemen—we can bear witness during half a century of observation—have exemplified the saying, 'The more haste the less speed.' The modest and retired have gone off first, in very much larger proportion. It has been a case of virtue rewarded. We have observed, too, that beauty is not everything—that is, skin-deep beauty; for I speak not of beauty which is a visible sign of moral beauty radiated from within. The belles of the season have not always done the best. We are not depreciating Nature's blessings, still less do we advocate the stupid and the slow. Small praise to those who only don't go wrong because there is no 'go' in them

at all. For ladies naturally lively and mercurial we claim allowance; and all men make it, though women arch their eyebrows as if the ghost of Hannah More would be startled from her grave. Believe us, modesty need never fear; it is the one of all qualities in which the instinct of a man is never deceived.

Not that we would venture to teach modesty pure and simple. This would defy the ladies' finishing academy, which, indeed, when we pass a dozen simpering saucy girls out for an airing, we think is rather the place not to learn it. We would only encourage the mother who decries reserve and modesty in her daughters to think hopefully of their chance.

Away with all neatly got-up and high-pressed editions of Mrs. Trimmer; though men may well be put upon their guard against those girls who do the dutiful, the affectionate, or the domestic, just as against certain mendicants made up to do 'the clean respectable dodge.' We once heard the different qualifications of a family characterised thus: 'Anna draws, Matilda is musical, Edith is generally accomplished; and as to the eldest, she goes in for religion.' On another occasion we heard remarked of two ladies rather *pa-sées*: 'I remember them well for years; they have rung the changes all round; they have tried High Church, they have tried Low; they have tried the fast line, they have tried slow; they have tried early services and flirtation ecclesiastical; tried everything; but it was all seen through; and there they are, shelved and stranded.'

The language at Scarborough in the height of the season used to be, and perhaps is, 'Any business doing?' Well, least business

have we seen done at or by balls. No, there is too much distraction. Cupid does not take flying shots; and he likes single birds, not thick coveys. It is the quiet morning—even picnics are too crowded—with a small family party, on a country-house visit, when a lady has dropped, as it were, from the clouds—not one of the neighbourhood; you may see too much of them, and there is nothing left for imagination. It is in this casual way that the impression is more often made. 'Love in idleness' is the proper flower to symbolise the occasion; only then, ye keen and eager chaperons, pray act at once—what fires so soon as soon may cool. We know our sex full well. One pretty girl makes an impression till a prettier rubs it out.

Now we will, for the good of the world, make a candid and personal confession. About that age when youth is most sensitive we were more in love, as we thought it, than we have ever been since, with the pleasant and amiable young companion of a sister. To say that we lived, indeed, to hear trifles light as air about her, and would spend hours and walk miles out of our way even to catch a sight of her, and thought of her in our waking as in our sleeping dreams—all this would feebly express what we thought the deepest devotion of our soul, when—as if to convince us of our delusion, invited to a ball where we were to meet her, she proved quite a morning, and not a lighting-up kind of beauty, and ill compared with several others in the room. We were disenchanted at once, and though we did not own it even to ourselves, the truth will appear from this that we asked several of those prettier young ladies to dance before we went near her.



So beware of long engagements. You must either shut a man up, or blind his eyes from seeing all other beauties, and keep 'other fair charmers away,' or else it will be not a feast of love, but a cold collation or a marriage out of principle, because 'too far gone to draw back with decency,' if indeed it does not prove that most cruel of all trials to any poor girl of heart-and-soul devotion—a Disappointment, to the triumph of all the neighbourhood, and the very wreck of a maiden's heart.

Yes, men are sad deceivers; and we doubt if any crimes deserve hanging, from their selfish heartless turpitude, worse than those of which woman is the victim. Man's so-called love is often three parts selfishness, from flattery and the triumph of success; and beyond all other spur is that of rivalry to cut each other out. When cut out, many a man, in a fit of annoyance, will marry the least attractive out of pique. In a 'love chase,' as in any other chase, the pleasure is in the pursuit—the fun is over when the fox is caught. When the dear devoted one has opened her heart and told her love, and is all undeniably your own, and in that safe and can't-spare-you way has hung about you for a month, the fit won't last—the o'erstrung lyre gets out of tune; and when once the vision of sentiment and imagination has melted into cold air, and man sees his intended, like the Fairy Queen, by daylight, perhaps with a cold and cough, with sal-low complexion and a little bilious, really we pity the chilly feelings and the gaunt despair of him, who, after investing the object of his plighted troth with a gorgeous suit of charms, the creation of a temporary hallucination, stands aghast at seeing that they do not fit.

No doubt there are love and

attachment between kindred souls in times after marriage well worthy of the name. All before is like the froth in a glass of champagne; this must go off to show the real quality. All we would impress on anxious mothers is that, having to deal with something thus of a frothy nature and quite a volatile essence, they give it no time to evaporate or subside.

An experienced old lady used to say, 'Don't tell me about engagements, love, and attachments, and all that, till you can report that they have been in and out of the lawyer's office.' People can't live upon air; and, to see some of them even at a wedding breakfast, you will find they are quite as hungry after marriage as before. Cupid is a young gentleman that must be well fed. 'Love in a cottage' seems all sunshine and honeysuckles; but rent and taxes, and soap, soda, and sand-paper, however vulgar and sublunary, must all be duly provided for.

So when you come to the settlement it often proves a settler indeed. Instead of money the gentleman has expectations, and is 'looking out for something to do;' he has 'a rich uncle, who may die,' or a bronchitic aunt not expected to wheeze and cough through another winter. You may have offers enough of this sort, just as the servant-maid has when she comes into her quarter's wages. Pray, madam, beware of all such; have no younger sons of younger brothers about your premises. Curates are very dangerous—no good themselves, they keep others off. As to dashing young officers, few can say, in the words of 'poor Miss Baily,' 'I've got a one-pound note in my regimental small clothes.' So be guarded and distant: let us recommend a cast of countenance like the builder's no-



tice-board—'No admittance except on business.'

But do not aim too high. The higher you aspire the less your chance, till at last it ends at a vanishing point. Just take your pencil and draw a pyramid, a cone, or a tall triangle. Take a slice off the base, and it is a very wide slice; this represents the comparative number of the striving men of business: and among them, most ladies proper would succeed. But this might be a little 'come down,' while every slice above represents a class smaller and smaller, literally fine by degrees and elegantly less. But beware of one danger. The higher you aspire the lower you may sink, with a great blot on your family escutcheon. Lord Burleigh truly said, 'Marry your daughters early or they will marry themselves,' and choose, in their despair, a partner for life even lower than the lowest you could have proposed to them.

This painful wound to family pride we have often witnessed. Some girls—very, very few—seem to have been born for old maids, wonderfully useful in their way as the good Aunt—standard roses in the garden of life.

The Aunt is quite an institution by the benevolence of Nature. What would the long families do without an Aunt? She comes in at every difficulty—is so much change of air after the measles, and nurses at intervals all the family in turn; pays for Ellen's music, Mary's drawing-lessons, or Charlie's scrapes; passes not the less happy because a self-denying life, appreciated by the ungrateful young brats perhaps some twenty years after date, having been previously regarded with *post-mortem* expectation. Children always expect her to die of old age, or at least that she could not wish to live after fifty; for then

they think 'superfluous legs the veteran on the stage.'

Well, madam, one out of six daughters may be reconciled to this lot in life, but what of the other five? They begin to be very impatient about thirty—they think the world is out of joint. 'Every natural wish implies an object;' then why not one for them? Their pretensions now, and what they expect and think they have a right to, abate a little in point of the gentleman's age as of his standing. Add to this, home is less enjoyable, whether it be Bath, Leamington, or Cheltenham—'they hate the place,' and want mamma to change. No wonder: so far they are known to all, but chosen by none; and every saucy Miss they meet eyes them as social failures. They are numbered with 'the ladies in waiting.' They see—O, with what eyes do they see!—how fast every year the nursery keeps pouring into the school-room, and emptying the school-room into the ballroom—precocious rivals who look at them as much as to say, 'Come, you have had your turn; make way for us.' Poor girls! or rather women! No wonder they hate the place, and would welcome any change. One family of young ladies, 'maidens all forlorn,' who had tried for many a 'priest,' if not 'all ahaven and shorn,' said to us after the wished-for migration, 'At all events there is no ill-nature here.' We knew what they meant, and really felt for them.

Add to these troubles, the loving mother often checks and treats them too much as in childhood; and even the sisters yearly diverge and grow apart. Perhaps Susan has grown nervous, while Charlotte has grown more rambunctious, and each views the other as an eager bidder for what is a

very scarce lot. Perhaps they have been their round on country visits, tried all the circles of all their friends by turns, and thus drawn every cover without result. This is the crisis for a foolish match—they will believe anything, catch at anything, and as for prospects, risk and venture everything; and the result is too often a lot far worse than what earlier they would have despised.

Some parting words of things not to do, madam—that is if you would have the best chance of getting your daughters off your hands.

Beware of four in hands or New-market coats and deerstalker hats. Never dress like gentlemen if you would please gentlemen. If men should be manly, ladies should be feminine. Slang may seem wit, fast, and original. With this view and ambition, be slangy if you please; but a slangy wife who could bear! 'Ladies have a right to dress as they like.' Granted; but who wants a wife to be mistaken from behind with a hearty slap on the back, with 'Well, old fellow, how are you?' Who enters on this line (if we know our sex) may almost 'give up hope.'

Beware of promiscuous lawn-tennis and all sorts of clubs, which take ladies morning and evening after men, as if all men were brothers. Fancy ladies—ladies proper, ladies feminine, and ladies modest, and with proper self-respect—boydening and straggling about after balls with men in flannels, and not even braces, and—a *tout ensemble* indescribable. Fancy 'walking with the guns,' following up men as they follow up their game, and not leaving them even for a shooting-luncheon in a field by themselves!

'What an old fogey! What old-fashioned notions! Have not

ladies a right, &c., to amuse themselves like others, and enjoy life in their own way? All this, mistake us not, we most freely admit; only 'getting off our hands' is just now our theme. We only say, remember the cost, a price at which few ladies intend to purchase this liberty of modern days—namely, to destroy all that charm so attractive to men—yes, even to men not the most particular; and as a result, rather to hang on than to 'get off' the parental hands, unless wedded to men of a bad style indeed.

Lastly, madam, beware of any Balls where you are not present, or staying at any Balls after supper. Give no men a chance to prime your daughters with champagne and then talk nonsense with them; the heat of dancing makes this far too easy. As to the latch-key, and ladies sent alone, with the mere fiction of one chaperon-general, and ladies returning at the small hours in the morning alone—if alone, but rarely unattended by some gentleman—hansom cabs preferred, and perhaps stopping to have a cosy little supper by the way—'we could a tale unfold.'

'Shocking! But my daughters, I know, are very different; their sense of strict propriety—'

Admitted, madam. This every mother would exclaim. Still, all young ladies must be somebody's daughters after all. Ask your husband what he hears—the talk of the clubs; men talk freely without names, and sometimes with names, too—and he will tell you that we have not cried aloud without a cause. In these days, when rules of prudence and etiquette are relaxed, deeds done by the few will, of course, be too freely attributed to the many—your innocent daughters not excepted from the suspected list.

## THE WHITETHORN-TREE.

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You stand alone in the sunshine,  
Lovely Whitethorn-tree,  
A snowdrift of blossoms laughing  
Honey for wild bees' quaffing,  
Like a bride in her bridal whiteness,  
Like a saint enrobed in brightness,  
Singing sweet songs to me ;  
Your every laughing blossom  
Nurses a song in its bosom,  
A sweet love-song for me.

Standing alone in the sunshine,  
Lovely Whitethorn-tree,  
Question each bramble and flower,  
Question your bride, the sun shower,  
Question the banqueting bee,  
And truly answer me—  
Was Winifred King's heart golden  
When to mine 'twas enfolden  
Beneath thy branches olden  
In my heart's infancy ?

She is now 'neath the green grass lying,  
And I trouble her sleep with my crying,  
And my soul to myself replying  
Whispers, 'In constancy  
She was too true to thee.'  
But O ! I was told she had sold  
Her love for the Earl's gold,  
That she was false to me ;  
From myself and my false love flying,  
I fled over mountain and sea.

'Standing alone in the sunshine,  
A hoary Whitethorn-tree,  
I've questioned each flower and bramble,  
The showers and bees that ramble  
Over the mountain and lea ;  
And I truly tell to thee  
That were you to wander and wander,  
A truer love, dearer and fonder,  
Than Winifred King bore thee  
You never and never will see.  
And never did hurricane's wing  
More grief to my bosom bring,

*The Whitethorn-Tree.*

And never did lightning's flashing  
 Through my heartstrings of brambles crashing  
     Call more blossom tears from me,  
     Than thy inconstancy  
 To the fairest, and rarest, and dearest  
     Maiden in Christandie !'

A sunshine ablaze in the sunshine,  
     O lovely Whitethorn-tree !  
 My heart is crushed and broken ;  
 Have you no little token,  
 Even a kindly word spoken,  
     Of hers to solace me  
     In my great misery !  
 And on you may Spring bestow  
 The loveliest blossoms that blow,  
 Your breast be a cage of birds,  
 Your brambles a wild harp's chords,  
     All singing melody,  
     O sweet Whitethorn-tree !

Standing alone in the sunshine,  
     A hoary Whitethorn-tree,  
 O youth with the soul of fire,  
 And pride like a towering spire,  
     Open your ears to me.  
 Here, under my bloomy arms,  
 You first saw her maiden charms,  
 Felt Love's subtle flame that warms—  
     Or warmed—the soul in thee ;  
 Here, under my shawl of bloom,  
 Last spring did Winifred come,  
 A lily breathing perfume,  
     Came weeping tears for thee,  
 And in the grass at my feet  
 She hid a token sweet—  
 A ring in a tress of hair ;  
 O look ! you will find it there :  
 And she sang in her wild despair,  
 ' O Alfred Lee, I am true to thee !  
 Twine this curl of hair round thy memory,  
 It binds the bright ring you gave to me  
 Under the bloom of the Whitethorn-tree !'

M. M. RYAN.

## THE CRAYFISH.

An Esthonian Story.

[This tale, for ages the delight of the shores of the Baltic, enlivening their long winter evenings generation after generation, has been communicated, through the *Journal des Débats*, as a New Year's Gift to the Western World, by the late M. Ed. Laboulaye, savant and senator. It is too good not to be farther transmitted, by our agency, to all English-speaking peoples and nations. Married readers may think what they like about it—and they will probably think more than they say; but bachelors and spinsters about to marry will do well to read it, and to reflect after reading.]

IN the neighbourhood of Revel there once lived a Woodman, who dwelt in a miserable hut on the borders of a forest, close to a deserted byway. Loppi—for that was his name—was as poor as Job, and also as patient. To complete the resemblance, Heaven had given him a wife who could easily have outscolded the patriarch's. She was called Masicas, which signifies, they tell us, Wood Strawberry. She was not naturally ill-natured, and never got out of temper when people agreed with her and did everything that she wished. But otherwise, she was not quite so gentle. If she held her tongue from morning till night, whilst her husband was at work in the forest or the fields, she made up for it by scolding from night till morning, all the time her lord and master was within doors. It is true that, as the old proverb says, 'When there is no hay in the rack, the horses begin fighting;' and abundance did not reign in the Woodman's cottage. Spiders spun no web there, because not a single fly was to be caught; and a couple of mice, who came in by chance, died of starvation very soon after.

Early one morning, when the cupboard was bare, and the gentle Masicas was scolding louder than

ever, the good man shouldered an empty sack, his only treasure, and took himself off, with a heavy sigh. He carried this wallet with him every day when he went to seek work, or rather to beg, glad enough if he could carry home a thick slice of black bread, a cabbage, or a few potatoes, bestowed on him through charity.

He was passing along the edge of a pond on which the first rays of sunshine were gleaming, when he saw, lying motionless in the dewy grass, the black outline of some unknown animal. He advanced close up to it with a noiseless step. It was an enormous Crayfish; he had never seen the like. The morning sun, or perhaps the fatigue of crawling about the grass, had apparently sent it to sleep. In an instant, without giving it time to escape, he had seized it by the body and whipped it into his sack. 'What luck!' thought Loppi; 'and how pleased my wife will be! It is a long while since she has had such a treat.'

He was jumping for joy, but suddenly stopped and turned pale. From the bottom of the sack there issued, in sepulchral tones, a human voice. The Crayfish was speaking to him!

'Hola, brother!' it said, 'halt

a moment, and set me at liberty. I am the Senior of all the Crayfish—more than a hundred years old. What good will my tough and aged carcass do you? A wolf would wear out his teeth in chewing me. Don't abuse the chance which put me in your power. Remember that, like yourself, I am one of the Bon Dieu's creatures. Have pity on me; you may one day want somebody to have pity on you.'

'My worthy Crayfish,' the Woodman answered, 'you preach to perfection; but don't take it amiss if I can't listen to your rhetoric. For my own part, I would cheerfully let you follow your own devices, but my wife expects me to bring her something for dinner. If I go back empty-handed—if I tell her that I caught the finest Crayfish that ever was seen, and then let it go again, she will kick up a row that will be heard as far as Revel. Knowing her temper as I do, I should be sure to catch a taste of her broomstick.'

'Are you obliged,' the Crayfish asked, 'to confess all your doings to your wife?'

Loppi scratched his ear, heaved a sigh, and then scratched his ear again.

'Ah, good friend,' he said, 'if you only knew Masicas, how sharp she is, you would not talk in that way. She has an irresistible art, whether you will or no, of worming out your secrets from the very bottom of your heart. Resistance is impossible. She will turn you inside out, like a rabbit-skin. She will make you tell her everything, and something else besides. Ah, she is a clever woman, a regular gray mare—thoroughbred!'

'I see, my good fellow,' the Crayfish replied, 'that you have enlisted into the Good Husband Regiment, and I congratulate you

thereupon. But as an empty compliment will render you small service, I offer to purchase my liberty at a price which will not displease Madame. Do not judge me by appearances. I am a Fairy; I may say, a powerful Fairy. It will be a good thing for you to accept my proposal. If you turn a deaf ear, you will soon be sorry for it.'

'Good Heavens!' exclaimed the puzzled Woodman, 'I don't want to harm a living soul. Only settle matters to Masicas's content, and I am quite willing to set you free.'

'Which fish does your wife like best?'

'I'm sure I don't know, nor she either. We poor folks haven't the time to be particular, if we do but get a bellyful. So long as I don't go home with nothing in my sack, that's all that's wanted. Nobody will say a word.'

'Set me down on the grass, then,' replied the Crayfish, 'and dip your sack into this corner of the pond. Very good. And now, presto! Fish into the Sack!'

In an instant the sack was full of fish—so full that it nearly slipped out of its owner's hands.

'You see you have not obliged an ungrateful person,' the Crayfish said to the astonished Woodman. 'You may return here every morning, and fill your wallet, by repeating the words, "Fish into the Sack!" And that is not all. You have been kind to me; I will be kind to you. If, by and by, you desire something else, come here and call me by these solemn words:

Cray, my friend, both Fay and Fish,  
Help me to fulfil my wish,

and I will answer your appeal and will see what I can do. One word more—a bit of friendly advice. If you want to lead a quiet

life, keep your own counsel. Say nothing to your wife about what has happened to-day.'

'I will try to, Madame Fairy,' the Woodman replied; at which the Crayfish, making a plunge, disappeared in the water. As for Loppi, he took the path leading back to his hut with a light step, and a still lighter heart.

As soon as he had entered he opened his sack. Out there came a pike, an ell long; a fine golden carp, which gaped and danced on the floor; a couple of nice tench; and heaps of roach and bream. The best fish-stalls in Revel could show nothing better. At the sight of this abundant supply Masicas screamed with delight, and threw her arms round Loppi's neck.

'My darling husband, my love of a husband, don't you now see that I did right in making you start early, to try and get something! Another time you'll attend better to what I say. What a capital catch! Go into the garden and fetch onions and garlic. There are still a few left. Run to the forest, where the mushrooms are fine. I will make you such a fish-soup as no king or emperor has ever tasted. And then we will grill the carp. 'Twill be a feast for a burgomaster.'

Their repast was merry. Loppi's wishes were Masicas's. He thought they had got back to their honeymoon. This was on a Saturday. But, alas, on the third day, Monday, the fish he brought was coldly received. On the fourth day Madame made wry faces. On Sunday she burst into a rage.

'Are you going to shut me up in a Convent? Am I a Nun, condemned to keep Lent everlastingly! Can anything be more disgusting than all this fish! The very sight of it turns my stomach.'

'What more would you have, then?' cried honest Loppi, who had not yet forgotten their days of starvation.

'What would I have, you booby! No more than what every decent family of peasant-proprietors has—a nice meat broth and a piece of roast pork. That's all I want to make me perfectly happy—I, who am so easily satisfied!'

'It cannot be denied,' thought the worthy Woodman, 'that freshwater fish is rather insipid, and that there is nothing like a good slice of pork to restore its tone to a feeble stomach. But the Fairy! Will she—can she—grant me so great a favour?'

Next morning, at daybreak, he ran to the pond, and ventured an appeal to his kind benefactress:

'Cray, my friend, both Fay and Fish, Help me to fulfil my wish.'

and soon one big black claw, and then another, rose out of the water, and then a head, shaped like a bishop's mitre, with staring eyes; and a well-known voice inquired, 'What is your desire, my brother?'

'For myself, nothing; I have all that I can wish for. But my wife is troubled with a weak digestion; she begins to get tired of a continual fish-diet. She would like something else; meat-soup, for instance, and a roast spare-rib of pork.'

'Is that all your dear helpmate requires?' the Crayfish asked, with a subdued chuckle. 'Make your mind easy, brother. At dinner-time strike the table thrice with your little finger, repeating each time "Meat-soup and roasted spare-rib, appear," and the wished-for dishes will soon be on the table. But take care, brother. Perhaps your wife's wants will not always be so moderate. Don't



make yourself their slave. If you do, you'll repent of it when it is too late.'

'I will try to,' said Loppi, with a sigh.

At the appointed time the dinner was on the table. Masicas was overflowing with joy and amiability. The gentleness of a lamb, the affection of a dove, are as nothing compared to the gracious assiduity with which she waited on her spouse. Those bright sunshiny days lasted a whole week; but shortly afterwards the sky was overcast, and the storm burst on Loppi's innocent head.

'When is this nuisance to come to an end? Do you want to kill me with loathing at this eternal beef-soup and fat roast pork? I can tell you I am not the woman to bear any longer such abominable treatment.'

'What else do you wish for, darling?' Loppi tenderly inquired.

'A bourgeois dinner, to be sure. A stuffed goose, with cakes and dessert.'

What could poor Loppi answer? He felt inclined to offer a few reasonable remarks, but he had not the courage to brave a scolding. A look from his wife made him shrink into the earth. So weak are we with those we love. Poor fellow! he could not close an eye all night. At daybreak he started for the pond, wandering up and down its banks without daring to utter the incantation. If the Fairy should think his request unreasonable, what excuse could he make? But at last, as there was no help for it, he screwed up his courage and once more recited:

'Cray, my friend, both Fay and Fish,  
Help me to fulfil my wish.'

'What is it you want, my brother?' immediately asked a voice which made him tremble.

'For myself, nothing; I have all I can wish for. But my wife's stomach begins to weary of meat-soup and roast pork. She would like something lighter; a stuffed goose, for instance, with cakes and dessert.'

'Is that all?' the good-natured Fairy answered, with pretended surprise. 'We will do our best to satisfy her once more. Go home, brother; you need not come to me every time your wife wants to change her bill of fare. Let her order what she likes; her table shall be faithfully and obediently served.'

No sooner said than done. When the Woodman got back he found the table laid out in regular order; pewter plates and dishes, forged iron spoons, three-pronged steel forks: the Fairy had done the thing in style. And then it brings the water into your mouth only to think of the goose stuffed with apples smoking hot, accompanied by fruit-jam sauce. And the beautiful rum pudding garnished with dried plums! Nothing was wanting on the table; not even a flask of cummin liqueur to enliven the feast. This time Loppi might fairly believe that he had reached the end of all his troubles.

Alas! In married life it is sometimes unfortunate if the husband inspires his wife with too lofty an idea of her lord and master's resources. Masicas was too astute not to know that some magical influence must be mixed up with the supply of such marvellous plenty. Naturally, she was determined to learn by what good genius they were patronised. Loppi strove hard to hold his tongue. But how was it possible to refuse to confide in so affectionate, tender, and amiable a wife? Loppi yielded to his better half's entreaties. Let the

first husband who would not do as much dare to throw a stone at him, and then proclaim what he has done before the united family conclave. He will be more rash than Alexander, braver than Caesar.

Masicas had sworn not to betray his trust to any living creature. She kept her promise—her nearest female neighbour dwelt two leagues away. But if she kept the secret she took care not to forget it.

Opportunities are easily found by those who look sharp after them. One evening, after Masicas had charmed her husband by her obliging temper and her cheerfulness, 'Loppi,' she said, 'my heart's delight, Loppi, although you have stumbled upon good luck, you hardly turn it to the best account. You never think of your poor little wife. I dine like a princess, but I dress like a beggar. Am I, if you please, so old and ugly that you let me go about in rags? What I am saying, my ducky darling, is not out of foolish coquetry. No. There is only one man in the world—you—whom I wish to please. I ought to have clothes like other ladies. Don't tell me that *that* is out of your power,' she added, with one of her most gracious smiles. 'I know what you can do; the Fairy will refuse you nothing. Can you deny this modest satisfaction to her who lives only for your sake?'

When a lady asks for a handsome dress merely to appear handsomer in her husband's eyes, what man is so barbarous as to deprive her of that pleasure, even were she to ask for a new one every day? Loppi was not a monster. Moreover, at the bottom of his heart, he thought Masicas was in the right. With their sorry clothing and their luxurious fare they had the air of sitting down to a

stolen dinner. How much more cheerful their table would be with the mistress of the house in a stylish costume!

In spite of all these fine reasons, Loppi, when he set out for the pond, was far from confident of success. He began to fear he was going too far. Consequently, when he summoned his benefactress he was in more than a little bit of a fright.

'Cray, my friend, both Fay and Fish—'

Before he could finish the invocation the Fairy had risen to the surface of the water.

'What is it you are wishing for, brother?'

'For myself, nothing. What can I want more? But you are so kind, so generous, that my wife takes new fancies into her head a little faster than she ought. She likes good living well enough, but she is now longing for something else besides. Her shabby clothes remind her of our former poverty, and at present she requires to be dressed like a lady.'

The good-tempered Crayfish burst out laughing. 'Go home, brother; your wife's requirements are amply accorded.'

Loppi gave utterance to a profusion of thanks, and absolutely insisted on kissing his friend's claw. All the way back he whistled and sang, as gay and as void of care as a chaffinch. On the road he met a fine lady clad in broadcloth, furs, and silk. He bowed low to salute the noble stranger; but the princess laughed in his face and threw her arms round his neck. It was Masicas in the plenitude of her charms; and, to tell the truth, she was not deficient either in grace or beauty. Of women it may be truly said that the frock makes the monk, and that fine feathers make fine birds.

This time Masicas was happy ; not a word can be insinuated to the contrary. But with happy people the misfortune is that one desire fulfilled begets another. What was the use of being a fine lady, while living apart from the world in a miserable hut, without a female friend to enrage with jealousy, and without a pier-glass mirror in which to admire herself from head to foot ? Masicas had not walked about a week in cloth and silk attire when she said to her husband, 'I have been thinking about our new condition ; it is ridiculous. I can't go on living in this way. A princely table, an elegant wardrobe, are quite out of keeping with a hovel shaken by every wind that blows. The Fairy has too much sense, and likes you too well, not to know that she owes us a residence where I can be lady of the manor from morning till night. After that, I shall wish for nothing more.'

'Alas, we are a lost couple !' Loppi exclaimed. 'By continually stretching the rope it will end by breaking, and we shall fall back into a more wretched state than that from which we have been delivered. Why can we not content ourselves with what we have ? There are hundreds of people who would think themselves lucky to be only half as well off as we are.'

'Loppi,' said Masicas impatiently, 'you will never be worth a rush. You are no better than a half drowned hen. Who ever got anything by being afraid to ask for it ? Are you the better or the worse for following my advice ? Be a man, then, and fear nothing. I answer for the result.'

She insisted in this way, and by still more forcible arguments, until the poor fellow set off again. His legs trembled under him as

he trudged along. Should the Fairy refuse to listen to him, he might, perhaps, get over the disappointment ; but how was he to confront his wife ? He was quite unable to sustain the assault and battery that would be sure to follow. He could only come to one resolution—namely, if the Fairy answered with an angry 'No !' he would throw himself, head foremost, into the pond. Bad as was the remedy, it seemed the lesser evil of the two.

Nothing is bolder than a coward at bay. With a formidable voice the Woodman shouted,

'Cray, my friend, both Fay and Fish, Help—'

'What is your wish, brother ?' the Fairy asked.

'For myself, nothing. What can I want more ? But my wife, in spite of all your favours, torments me night and day, to get me, most unwillingly, to make a fresh request.'

'O, ho !' said the Crayfish. 'This is a new start. You have told our secret to your wife. You may now bid adieu to peace and quiet. And pray what does my fine lady want, now that she thinks she has me in her power ?'

'A manor house, kind Fairy—quite a small château ; in order that the residence may answer to the dresses you have given her, make Masicas a Baroness, please do ; she will be so delighted that we shall never, no never, ask you for anything more.'

'Brother,' gravely replied the Crayfish, 'be it as your wife desires ;' and abruptly disappeared.

Loppi had some difficulty in finding his way back. The aspect of the country had changed. There were fields in high cultivation—meadows filled with cows and oxen. Before him there stood a mansion, built of brick, in the

midst of a garden full of flowers and fruit-trees. How was it that he had never seen this château before? While he stood still, admiring it, there issued from the front-door a richly-clad and dignified lady, who, smiling graciously, offered him her hand. It was Masicas.

'At last,' she said, 'I have all I can desire. Embrace me, my excellent Loppi. Yes, you may. My wishes are fulfilled. I thank you; I thank the benevolent Fairy.'

Who was enchanted, delighted, ravished? Certainly, it was our worthy Woodman. Could he possibly dream a more flattering dream? In less than an hour to shift from poverty to riches, from contempt to consideration, to dwell in a château with a charming wife always in good humour, whose only thought was to make things pleasant. Loppi, perfectly happy, wept for joy.

Unfortunately, after dreaming comes the waking-up. Masicas thoroughly enjoyed every pleasure that wealth and grandeur can bestow. All the Barons and all the Baronesses of the neighbourhood strove which should have the honour of visiting and receiving her. The Governor of the province was at her feet. The universal talk was about her toilettes, her château, her stables, her model farm. Had she not the fastest trotters in all the country round; English cows with scarcely any horns, and still less milk; English hens which laid scarcely an egg, but were as beautiful as pheasants, and as wild; English pigs so fat that neither their head nor their tail nor their feet were visible? What more could Masicas require to be the happiest of women? Alas! she had experienced only too much good fortune. Ambition was

gnawing at her heart. She felt herself capable of widespread dominion, and she took care to let her husband know it. The great lady would be a queen.

'Don't you observe,' she asked Loppi, 'how respectfully everybody obeys my orders? Why so? Because they are always just and wise. Even you, who are more headstrong than a mule—even you are obliged to acknowledge that I am never wrong. I am born to be a Queen; I have no doubt about the matter.'

Loppi made strong objections. He got for answer that he was a simpleton. Who had obtained for him his fine château? Why, she who had compelled him, in spite of himself, to return to the Crayfish. It would be the same thing now. He should be a King, whether it suited him or not; and it would be to his wife that he owed his crown.

Loppi had not the slightest desire to reign. He ate a good breakfast and a better dinner every day, and that was quite enough for him. But, above all things, he liked a quiet life; and he could not forget that, with his darling partner, the only condition of repose was perfect submission to Madame's caprices. He scratched his head, he sighed—it is even said that he swore a little; but he went on his errand all the same; and, as soon as he reached the pond, he invoked his friend the Crayfish in his softest accents. He saw two big black claws rise from the water; he heard the question, 'What is your wish, my brother?' But he waited a while before answering, so conscious was he of the extravagance of his demand. At last he replied,

'As to myself, I want nothing. What more can I desire? But my wife is beginning to get tired of her Barony.'

'What, then, does she want?' said the Fairy.

'Alas!' murmured Loppi, 'she wants to be a Queen.'

'O, ho!' said the Crayfish. 'It is lucky for her and for you that you spared my life. This once again I will obey your wife's will. I am your humble servant, O Consort of a Queen; and I wish you joy of it. Good-evening!'

When Loppi reached home, the château had grown into a palace; his wife was a Queen. Valets, pages, chamberlains, maids of honour, were running in all directions to execute the sovereign's commands.

'Heaven be praised!' thought the Woodman; 'I shall now have a little rest at last. Masicas has reached the top of the tree; it is impossible for her to mount any higher. And she has so many people about her to do her will, that I shall sleep in peace, and not be called up a dozen times every night.'

Nothing is so fragile as the happiness of Kings, unless it be the happiness of Queens. Two moons had not yet filled their horns before Masicas took a new fancy into her head. She summoned Loppi to her presence.

'I find being a Queen very wearisome work,' she said. 'The insipidity of my courtiers is perfectly disgusting. I should like to have free men to command. Go to the Fairy just once more, and make her give me what I desire.'

'Good gracious heavens!' cried Loppi; 'if you are not contented with a crown, what is it that you can possibly want? Do you wish, perchance, to be the Bon Dieu in person, and to take the place of Providence?'

'Just so; and pray why not?' Masicas quietly replied. 'Do you

suppose the world would be worse governed than it now is?'

Loppi stared at his wife, half-stupefied. Evidently the poor woman was out of her mind. Shrugging his shoulders, he answered,

'Say and do what you will, I am not going to trouble the Fairy with your insane request.'

'We shall see about that,' cried the furious Queen. 'Have you forgotten who I am? Obey me instantly, or I will have you beheaded!'

'I'm off directly, please your Majesty,' said the Woodman. 'I may as well be killed by the Fairy,' he thought, 'as by my wife's executioner. Perhaps the Crayfish will be the more merciful of the two.'

He tottered as he walked, like a drunken man, and found himself at the water's edge without knowing how he had got there. He then shouted the invocation, like a drowning man calling out for help; but no answer came. A dead silence hung over the pond; not even the buzzing of a gnat could be heard. He shouted again; but all was still. He shouted a third time.

'What do you want? a severe voice inquired.

'For myself, nothing. But the Queen, my wife, has commanded me to come here once more, for the last time.'

'What more *can* she want?'

Loppi fell on his knees.

'Forgive me, O beneficent Crayfish. It is not my fault. My wife wants—to be—'

'Silence! Hold your impious tongue! I know what you were about to say. Your wife is fit for a lunatic asylum, and you for the whipping-post. Miserable dogs! Back to your kennel!'

The Crayfish then plunged into the pond in such a passion of

anger that the water hissed and boiled as if a score of red-hot mill-stones had been thrown into it.

Loppi fell flat with his face to the ground. Had he been stricken by lightning he could not have fallen flatter. When he got up to return home, with a hang-dog countenance, he recognised only too well the path he had so often traversed. The border of the forest with its spindly birch-trees and its stunted firs, the pools of black water, and, further on, a miserable hut, told him that he had fallen into his pristine poverty, to be more wretched, if possible, than ever. What would Masicas say? How should he console her? His reflections on that matter were speedily cut short; for an ugly dirty hag, in rags, seized him by the throat, and tried to strangle him.

'You monster!' she screamed. 'Your absurdities and weakness have been our ruin. You have displeased and irritated your accursed Crayfish. I ought to have expected as much. You have never loved me—never taken any pains to please me. You are a selfish, good-for-nothing, pig-headed, ungrateful egoist. I will be the death of you! indeed I will!'

She would have torn his eyes out, had he not with difficulty seized her arms, at the same time remonstrating,

'Take care, Masicas; be calm; you will make yourself ill.'

But remonstrance was useless. Loppi felt that his strength was failing, when her face suddenly

turned purple, she threw herself backwards, raised her arms, and fell heavily to the ground. Her fit of rage had killed her.

Loppi mourned his wife, as every good husband ought. He buried her with his own hands beneath the shade of a lofty pine. He placed a flagstone over her grave and built a dry stone wall round it, to keep out noxious animals. That duty fulfilled, he fell a victim to despair. He was not made to live alone.

'What am I to do? What is to become of me,' he sobbed aloud — 'isolated, abandoned, obliged to take care of myself? Whom have I now to think for me, to decide for me, to speak for me, to act for me, as my dearly-beloved used to? Who will wake me up ten times in the night, to tell me what I must do in the morning? I am no better than a body without a soul—a corpse! With my dear Masicas life has departed. All that remains for me is to die.'

He spoke the truth. At the approach of winter a peasant, going to the forest, perceived a man lying on the snow. It was Loppi, dead, a week ago, of cold, hunger, and despondency; without a friend or neighbour to close his eyes. His frozen hand still held a tool, with which he had scratched an affectionate epitaph on the tomb of her who had been the charm of his life:

TO THE BEST OF WIVES,  
THE MOST INCONSOLABLE  
OF HUSBANDS.



## A MIDSHIPMITE—OLD STYLE.

BEFORE me lies a medal—one of those issued for the Navy about forty years ago; a medal with two clasps, dated respectively 1808 and 1814.

As I look at it I can but think how different was the lot of the boy who earned it from that of his successors of the present day. The modern midshipman is as plucky as the young sea-lions to whom ironclads were unknown, and as willing to endure privation in the service of his sovereign and his country; but he is spared the *ennui* of those long voyages, when the taste of fresh meat was almost forgotten; and he does not thankfully eat his biscuit after first knocking it against the table to evict the tenants, who used to come swarming out—a colony of weevils. The modern midshipman is educated, and though the free wild waves have not ceased to impart something of their buoyant nature to the lad who occupies his 'business in the great waters,' his spirit is somewhat chastened by thoughts of the inevitable examination.

Now the middymite who won my medal never had this weight on his mind. He had always longed for the life of a sailor, and on being introduced by his school-master, Dr. Crombie, to the characters of the Greek alphabet, he expressed his determination to go to sea at once. He met with no opposition to his wish. He was one of a large family, and most English fathers had a son in the Navy. We were possessed by a martial spirit then. All Europe west of Russia lay at the feet of

'General Buonaparte;' but on the sea we were supreme, and at home we heard no sounds of war, thanks to the silver thread and the wooden walls which guarded our shores. There was little difficulty in obtaining a midshipman's berth; so, at the age of eleven, the boy, whom I shall designate by one of his initials, 'D.,' was put on the top of a coach, and sent to sea. The coach was full of naval men; amongst them Sir Pultenay Malcolm, who asked D. the name of his ship, and good-naturedly paid for his dinner, saying, 'You are like a young bear: you have all your troubles before you.'

D. soon experienced the truth of this remark, for his first captain was a martinet. The little fellow was expected to know his duties almost by intuition, and the perpetual call to 'Mr. D.' was so invariably a prelude to a reprimand or a mastheading that he soon learned to hate the sound of his own name. By some culpable neglect on the part of his family, whose circumstances were not such as to afford them any excuse, D. had not been provided with an outfit sufficient for a long voyage. His uniforms got shabby, and the sight of them must have been annoying to so smart an officer as Captain M. For some trivial fault he ordered D. to go ashore, adding, 'And if you come back, you young rascal, I'll cut you to pieces.' The vessel was anchored off the coast of Newfoundland, the month was March, and D. landed without the means of procuring food or shelter. An



old sailor, who observed the forlorn boy, accosted him; and D., glad to hear a friendly voice, told his tale. His captain had sent him ashore, and told him not to come back. The good-hearted old seaman took him home, and shared with him his supper and his bed, but in the morning told him he must return to his ship.

'If I do,' said D., 'the captain will cut me to pieces.'

'Never you mind. If you don't go back, you'll be deserting your ship.'

D. went back; the captain took no notice of him, and for a day or two all went on as usual. Then he was sent for about the hammocks, which the captain was inspecting. D. held a list, and the captain examined the corresponding marks on each hammock. He asked D. the number which he ought to have found on one of them. D. referred to the list; but he had not opened a book since he left Dr. Crombie's, and he was fast becoming illiterate; the writing was crabbed, he could not make it out, and a high wind fluttered the paper in his hand. No doubt he blundered; and, while trying to get right, the wind tore the list from his fingers, and carried it out to sea. Then Captain M.'s dislike to the boy found expression; he gave him two dozen, and sent him before the mast. The corporal punishment D. took as a matter of course; such little incidents were not infrequent in the life of a midshipman eighty years ago. 'It made me very hot, and I was glad when it was over,' I once heard him say. But to serve before the mast was another matter. He was too sensitive to be indifferent to degradation, and too proud of his profession, with all its hardships, to lose his status in it without a pang and some secret tears.

The boy was popular among his shipmates, and they gave him as much sympathy as they dared. 'Of course you'll mess with us, all the same,' said the midshipmen; but this the captain prevented. Then the warrant officers invited him to mess with them; but Captain M., little pleased with what he might regard as a tacit reproach, again interfered, and deprived D. of any companionship save that of the common sailors.

Brought to their level, D. at once accepted the inevitable situation, and cheerfully identified himself with the blue-jackets, who still regarded him with 'the grotesquely-blended feelings, almost paternal,' of the tar to the brave stripling who commands him. D. could no longer claim their obedience, but he continued to be the object of their protection and care; and, after the first plunge into this, new life, he seems to have made himself happy enough. It must have been at that time that he learnt a song, afterwards forbidden as mutinous, which set forth the incapacity of each officer in turn. I can only remember a line or two, one being

'The master can't steer if he's asked.'

But even this mutinous ditty had a cheerful refrain:

'We're in for it, ne'er mind what follows,  
boys,

Don't be down-hearted—Yo-ho'

Life in the for'castle ended for D. when the ship came into port. His elder brother was there to meet him, and was astonished to find him in the garb of a sailor-boy. Such treatment as he received is not in our days possible; if it were, what a chance it would be for the newspapers! At every railway-station we should read in large type, 'Extraordinary Occurrence! A Midshipman before the Mast. Cruelty of a Naval Cap-

tain.' Then the pictorial papers would have a woodcut of the young gentleman, 'our special' would interview him, the Opposition would mention him in the House, and Mrs. Leo Hunter would invite him to her 'at home.' But in this century's first decade the *Times* consisted of a single sheet, the outside half being devoted to advertisements, while the two inside pages afforded little space for the notice of even the great Continental wars; and gave a meagre account of home news, such as the abolition of the slave trade, the resignation of Ministers, theatrical doings, Queen Charlotte's dinner-party; and last, but not least, the grand lottery, which had a full column to itself. What room was there for the wrongs of poor little D.?

The return home was probably the worst part of his misfortunes. Mr. D., though a kind-hearted man, was proud rather than fond of his children; he was not the sort of father to whom a son could tell his true tale, and put himself in the right. Happily the boy was not long at home, for his father made haste to get him a berth in another ship—this time with an outfit sufficient for the longest voyage; and D. again took his place in the cockpit, and wore a middy's uniform. It was not always worn with satisfaction; the constant worry from superior officers, and the cruel punishments, caused the distinguishing marks of the uniform to be called 'The curse of God.'

But D. loved the sea with enthusiasm. Scarcely ever in his life did he read a line of verse; yet his intense appreciation of every change in the fleeting clouds, of every aspect of the many-tinted waves, of all the wonders of the deep, belonged to the nature of which poets are

made, much as he would have scorned the imputation.

In the *Comet*, sloop-of-war, Captain Daley, he first heard the boom of an enemy's gun. One summer day, as she sailed from Gijon on the Spanish coast, three strange sail came in sight—a corvette and two man-of-war brigs. Captain Daley hoisted the private signal, and when it was not answered, concluded that they were enemies. In face of so superior a force, he continued his course under full sail, thinking if he altered it they might be inclined to give chase. Four hours after the vessels were first sighted, the corvette tacked, and stood to the southward, seeing which Captain Daley determined to engage the two brigs, and carried all possible sail in chase of them. The chances of war were, of course, in favour of the enemy, and the crew of the *Comet* concluded that those who escaped the enemy's guns would pass the next few years of their lives as prisoners in a foreign land. In the afternoon one of the brigs tacked, and passed the *Comet* to windward; and at five p.m. the other vessel hoisted that 'tricolour' which Englishmen of those days associated with the Reign of Terror and the guillotine. It had not become less obnoxious because it was now the flag of a usurper and our powerful antagonist.

D., then fourteen years of age, thought the prospect before him a doleful one. He went below for a few moments of 'midshipman's comfort,' i.e. a look at the contents of his box. There was little there to interest him—none of the many trifles which are treasured in memory of a happy home; but he possessed one book—his Common Prayer-book. Probably he had never looked into it since he joined his ship, but

now he opened it, and offered up the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men. 'I'll have an English book in my French prison,' he thought, as he put it into his pocket; and then he went on deck, and was the readiest and cheeriest midshipman there.

A sharp fight ensued, but not with the anticipated result, for, after twenty minutes of close action, the French captain hauled down his flag, and the tricolour, triumphant on so many battle-fields, struck to the Union Jack. When le Capitaine Clemont came on board the Comet, he exclaimed, 'O, what a small vessel! I would never have struck to her had I known her size!' Three days after the engagement the Comet sailed into Plymouth Sound with her splendid prize, and all the town were flocking on the Hoe to see the victorious little sloop and the captured brig Sylphe.

There was no notice of this sea-fight in the *Times*; but in the number for August 19 (Friday) I find the following: 'The French officers of La Sylphe, brought into Plymouth on Monday by the Comet, were examined on the following day. After their examination they visited the Commercial Coffee-house, and read the paper which gave an account of Dupont's defeat and surrender, which they said was impossible. There might be some trifling disturbance in Spain, but of no consequence. When told of the surrender of the French fleet to the Spanish garrison at Cadiz, they said, with a shrug and a great deal of nonchalance, "*Ce n'est pas vrai*."'

Poor French gentlemen! We wonder how they liked the concoction called coffee at that commercial house!

D. was on shore for a brief space in 1812, when he was seventeen. The education he had re-

ceived at school he had by this time almost forgotten; he could not read aloud intelligibly, and wrote slowly in an unformed hand; but in seamanship he could have passed an examination in which modern midshipmen, two years his seniors, often fail, simply from having had no practical experience. On his return home he devoted himself to the practice of the two useful arts in which he was deficient; but this peaceful occupation was soon interrupted, and, in his Majesty's ship *Phoebe*, Captain Hillyer, he sailed on secret service in March 1813. This service proved to be the destruction of the United States fur establishment upon the river Columbia. On reaching the island of Juan Fernandez, Captain Hillyer heard of the depredations of the *Essex*, Captain Porter, among the whale-ships, twelve of which had been captured. These were valued by the Americans at 2,500,000 dollars; and their captor was a great favourite at Washington, where wonderful tales were told of his chasing English ships which refused to fight, and fled, under press of canvas, from the redoubtable *Essex*.

In December the *Phoebe*, accompanied by the *Cherub*, sloop-of-war, arrived at Lima for refreshments. At that time there were several dogs on board, and, as Captain Hillyer wished to surprise the *Essex*, he gave orders to have them killed, lest their barking should warn Porter of his approach. D. was the midshipman who had to see this order enforced, an order particularly distasteful to him, as he had a favourite of his own, a small white dog, with long silky hair, whose life he resolved, if possible, to save. He therefore washed and combed it, and went on shore. There he bought some blue ribbon and tied

a bow into each of the little creature's ears, which had been slit to admit of such decoration. Then he walked along a street of Lima, with the dog in his arms, at the hour when the young ladies of the place come out with their duennas, and among them he looked out for a mistress for his pet. No doubt the ladies of Lima were all hours in his eyes, and presently he beheld a 'most beautiful' girl, accompanied by an elder lady. He stood before her, bowed deferentially, said in English, 'Will you have my dog?' and placed it in her arms. She blushed, and so no doubt did he. She uttered little exclamations in Spanish, and caressed the dog. D. took off his hat and walked away. He turned at the corner of the street and looked back. The lady, with her duenna, was still standing where he had left her; she was still caressing his dog, and, at the same time, evidently following him with her eyes, for, as he turned, she waved her hand in farewell.

On the 7th of February 1814 Captain Hillyer found the frigate of which he was in search. The *Essex*, and the *Essex Junior*, with three prizes, were at anchor in the neutral port of Valparaiso, where he blockaded them for more than a month. Captain Porter afterwards boasted that he 'endeavoured to provoke a challenge.' D.'s account of his proceedings differed slightly. Captain Hillyer, like Gambier, Exmouth, Codrington, and other naval officers of his day, was a religious man, and every Sunday he read prayers and a sermon to his officers and men. Captain Porter seems to have discovered this; for as soon as the Sunday service began, the *Essex* came out of harbour. Captain Hillyer quietly read on, ignoring the suppressed

but ill-concealed impatience and excitement of the congregation. At last he would look up, and say, 'Now, my lads, prepare for action! We shall fight none the worse for having prayed.' On perceiving that the 'challenge' was accepted, Captain Porter was wont to retire into harbour.

On the 28th of March the two American vessels attempted to escape. The *Essex* sailed out with top-gallant sails set, on which Captain Hillyer made sail to close with her. 'On rounding the outer point of the bay, the *Essex* braced up close, in hopes to weather the British ships, and escape, but in the attempt carried away her main-top-mast. Captain Porter now tried to regain the limits of the (neutral) port; failing in that also, he dropped anchor so near the shore as to preclude the possibility of any ship passing ahead of him.\* The action that ensued lasted forty-five minutes, as Captain Hillyer's clerk, watch and notebook in hand, averred. No one else could take note of the hour; for, as D. used to say, during the intense excitement of a sea-fight time seems to fly. He found some amusement during those lively forty-five minutes; for a midshipman discovered that another denizen of the cockpit had hidden himself in one of the boats, impelled by a somewhat ostrich-like idea of safety. To pull the poor lad out of his very inefficient refuge, and to enjoy a laugh at his expense, was the natural consequence of such a discovery.

A terrible accusation was brought against Captain Hillyer by the captain of the *Essex*. In a letter to the American Secretary he stated that the *Phoebe* continued to fire ten minutes after he had hauled down his colours. 'I di-

\* James's *Naval Occurrences*.

rected an opposite gun to be fired, to show them we intended no further resistance; but they did not desist; four men were killed at my side, and others in different parts of the ship. I now believed he intended to show us no quarters (*sic*), and that it would be as well to die with my flag flying as struck, and was on the point of again hoisting it, when, about ten minutes after hauling the colours down, he ceased firing.' It is not necessary to waste words in refuting this atrocious libel. Certainly, of all the gallant naval captains of his day, James Hillyer was the last of whom such inhumanity could be believed.

But accuracy of statement was not Captain Porter's strong point. To account for his defeat, he declared that his ship 'was cut up in a manner which was perhaps neverbefore witnessed.' She was in fact in such a 'shattered state' that he believed she would never reach England. Yet Captain Hillyer brought her safely home; and for many years she did duty in the British Navy as H.M.S. Essex. She was a forty-two gun and the Phoebe a thirty-two gun frigate.

A surprise awaited the crew of the victorious Phoebe as she entered the Channel. A French

sail was sighted, and the middy who sighed for a lieutenant's epaulette rejoiced in the prospect of another action, and a chance of distinguishing himself. The Frenchman's colours ran up to the masthead. But what colours! Where was the tricolour!

It had fallen from frozen fingers on the snows of Russia; it lay torn and tanned beneath the walls of Leipsic; and the Bourbon lilies were the unwelcome token of peace to every unutterably disgusted midshipman. And for many long years middies grew from mites to men of twenty-five and thirty before the cockpit ceased to be their messroom, even if they were fortunate enough to get afloat.

Since then two generations have arisen, and the hardships endured by boys under tyrannical captains have now become matters of mere family tradition, or contribute their quota of sensation to the pages of the naval novel.

I return my medal to its resting-place, and recall, with mingled feelings, the pleasure it gave D. on its arrival in his inland home, and the pride with which it was regarded by his children.

F. D.

## CHATEAUX D'ESPAGNE.

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It's nice to loll over a novel,  
And dream of impossible fate;  
Of princes who knock at your hovel,  
And offer their hand and their state;  
Of princesses, struck with your bearing,  
Who send round their pages to call;  
Of millionaires who, the grave nearing,  
Are anxious to leave you their all.  
It is hard from your day-dream to part;  
But, though it be painful to lose it,  
Leave it *inside* the book when you close it:  
It won't do to take it to heart.

It's nice to be dazzled with glamour  
Of footlights and fairy-like scenes,  
Of heroes who all hearts enamour,  
And heroines fitted for queens;  
It's nice to imagine existence  
All melody, sunshine, and May—  
All conquest 'gainst feeble resistance,  
All feasting with nothing to pay.  
Though it's hard from your fancies to part,  
Leave them inside the 'house' when you quit it;  
It's no use to wish you may get it:  
It won't do to take it to heart.

It's a work-a-day world we inhabit,  
Romance has no place as it's planned:  
The gods, unless able to cab it,  
Would be very much splashed in the Strand.  
Heroics, 'neath cynical stricture,  
A death beyond curing have died:  
Wings are all very well in a picture,  
But quite in the way in Cheapside.  
From the limelight of life we must part:  
Take care, as the quarter-days fly,  
To 'do' just as you'd be done by:  
That's all that needs laying to heart.

R. T. GUNTON.

## Riverside Sketches.

### I.

#### THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS.

A COMMON bargee—a smoke-be-grimed bloated ruffian, you say. Yes, he is that, and that only, nowadays. He scowls at you beneath shaggy grizzled eyebrows in return for the look of inquiry you direct towards him, and clenches his muscular fists at the slightest accidental touch of any passer-by. You will notice that, as he slouches along the uneven pavement of the river purlieus which he haunts, he gives way to no man, woman, or child, squaring his broad shoulders, and making an angle of his elbows, from his hands in his pockets, as if determined to force every one alike into the loathsome gutter. Listen to the torrent of foul abuse that he hurls at one of the warehouse porters on the wharf above him, as this one carelessly suffers a grain-sack to slip backwards on to his head. You shudder at such a stream of blasphemous oratory, probably wondering why a paternal government can do so little for the redemption of its rank and file. Billy Davis belongs to what we call the dangerous classes. Yet even this villanous-looking low-lived piece of humanity, who is now of the beasts who will perish without salvation, once, from out of the surrounding darkness, saw light. High instincts of humanity and love, which is divine in however mean a vessel, stirred up a pure flame in his savage ignorant breast—a flame which destroyed for the time being all that was earthly, sensual, devilish. A better life

lay open to him, and the hard husk of a brutal animalism was cast off. Alas! only for a while, because the light of love went out, and in the darkness which followed the bargee was once more beset by familiar spirits. The last state of this man is worse than the first. O strange sad destiny to have seen and felt the blessed influence of day, and to be hurled back to endless night! Who shall declare these things? Which of us shall dare to interpret a mysterious doom such as this? We see the kingdom of righteousness depart from a human soul, and we know not how it came there at all, or why it should go. The writing on the walls within the chambers of human hearts finds no Daniel to unfold its meaning. Verily, says a voice from out of thick mists of surrounding darkness to us poor wandering children, 'My ways are not as your ways, neither are my thoughts as your thoughts.'

I am going to ask you careless people who pass daily, or frequently, up and down the water highway of our city, whether you ever take count or thought of the human beings you see upon it—that amphibious humanity which plies small boats and barges of provisions or cargo in and out amongst the greater vessels. Sailors of all sorts—not the wretched half-and-half mixed material—mariners, pilots, and even cabin-boys, have come in for a large amount of poetic enthusiasm; they



are an unfailing stock-in-trade in the way of metaphors to fervent disciples of the Muses. But the smaller river-fry—watermen, bargees, and mudlarks—meet with scant courtesy from any literature or art. Why should they? They are neither picturesque nor deserving as a race, and naturally our thoughts rise above such sedimentary existences. The mud is worth stirring up, for all that. Good things have come out of Galilee. Here and there, beneath the filth and dross of a refuse humanity, deeper than the stench of vice, below vile words and coarse manners, live immortal instincts, which are of the breath of God. Take down the shutters of coarseness and brutality for a while, and look what strange unimagined resources of happiness and goodness are sometimes hidden behind them.

You are now to imagine yourself between Westminster and Greenwich on a noisy steamboat. Naturally you look beyond the dingy rows of lighters, loaded and unloaded, which disfigure the river with a grimy ragged fringe. Your glance rests above the wooden tiers of barges, beyond the dusty wharves, with stacks of coal or barricades of casks; the lofty warehouses and huge manufactories tower more majestically and attractively in the background. Such amazing signs of wealth cause you perhaps to smile complacently towards your foreign neighbour, who makes acquaintance, in a cheap and sensible way, with British glories of architecture and trade from the deck of a penny steamboat. It does not occur to you to think that these vast buildings are reared by many insignificant hands, are fed by humble Thames workers, and are altogether dependent on mean and contemptible instruments. If you

are not a philanthropist *pur sang*, or think it your duty to be one, and subscribe to the Kyrle Society and Charity Organisations, you neither know nor care anything about those who find their bread on any muddy waters, labouring to and fro in filth of slime and ooze and general rottenness. I wonder how you and I would come out of generations of such contact! Any better, do you think, than Toms, Dicks, and Harrys of Blackfriars and Blackwall?

Barge life is not refined, and it is certainly not clean or odouriferous. Moreover, it is dangerous in winter fogs, toilsome in summer suns. Lighters or dumb barges have no pretension to beauty of form or colour. The eye of the beholder which could invest them with loveliness must be altogether an abnormal organ. Neither are their owners precisely to be named courtiers in address or speech, though, after their fashion and understandings, they are witty. Well accustomed to be sworn at from other barges and vessels, or threatened by apoplectic steamers unable to contain themselves, the lighterman finds no opportunity for cultivating the soft answer. There is, in fact, never time to turn away wrath on the river, for the tide waits for no man or his speech. The bargee is used to have his right of way disputed or his dilatory proceedings criticised with damnatory clauses containing no aroma of faint praise, so that he develops from early years a powerful vocabulary of choice retort. In the arsenal of his mind, where he manufactures and stores such weapons, he keeps a store of the most efficacious speech. Evolutionary theories may be applied to language, and the survival of the fittest helps bargees to retain

the most telling words of malediction. Every man outside his calling is ready to turn hand and tongue against him. Dock-masters, custom-house officers, policemen, and pilots condemn his race as the extreme of blackguardism in deportment and language. Give a dog a bad name, and hang him, pray, at once. Theories of predestination are very apt to develop a reckless indifference. Our bargee never paves his way downwards with anything so troublesome as good intentions. He knows the road marked out for him, and makes no demur to following it. 'Kismet' is the cry in the hearts of a large section of our Babylon's poor.

Billy Davis, some fifteen years ago, was one of the most rabid obstructionists on the river, and the wildest and most daring of the savages in his locality ashore. He had been wanted by the police often enough, and had endured short incarcerations an unlimited number of times. He did not lose caste on that account. A loafer and a quarrelsome ruffian, he was aggressive on small provocations, seeming to live most contentedly in an atmosphere of rowdiness and fighting. Very few Saturday nights came round without testifying that he had been 'at Blackwall' during the week. This, in river parlance, signified black eyes. Between Blackfriars Bridge and Limehouse he trafficked to and fro, from ship to shore, spending his days in hard manual labour of heaving sacks and casks, varying the monotony of his performance by drinking and quarrelling. In all winds and weather he ferried his daily loads amidst steamers and trading vessels, labouring hard, like the beast of burden he was, amidst tide-refuse and a floating scum of humanity. His nights he spent in some of

the many pot-houses bordering the river. Billy was then somewhere about thirty, a strapping broad-shouldered man of a loutish type. He passed amongst his mates for good-looking, having large massive features and a shock of straight black hair. He was ogled and simpered at considerably by a bevy of dirty water-side nymphs, ladies whose buxom proportions and Billingsgate phraseology did not accurately identify them with any sirens extant. Strange to say, Billy was unmarried, and not particularly partial to the fair sex. How he had escaped the wiles of seductive dameels and designing widows seemed a mystery. It appeared that, though he had given himself up to much indecorous riot of drinking and to illegal acts of fighting, he had never met his ideal amongst that rude rollicking set. Feminine opinion rated his attentions at a corresponding high value. To be chucked under the chin or treated to a drop of drink by him was an honour not lightly esteemed. He was, in fact, hall-marked amongst the bachelors. His fellows naturally envied him the extra shillings which no domesticity could claim, and which said shillings were impartially distributed in various bars.

Look well once more at that hardened drink-soddened face—at the beetling brow and fierce animal glare of those bloodshot eyes—and tell me, O physiognomist, if you can connect soft feelings with any feature, or associate tenderness with those coarse lips and that violent demeanour! Methinks the shutters here are up for evermore.

On an autumn morning fifteen years ago, there befell Billy Davis a strange event. It was Monday. Billy's eyes were in 'half-mourning.' He had hardly recovered

from the effects of a Sunday carouse, and, to use his own expression, was 'stale drunk.' In the pearly light of the October dawn he staggered uncertainly down the slimy steps of the wharf where he had moored his lighter on Saturday. It was low tide, and creeping things innumerable seemed, in this dim light, to be writhing and crawling in the mud about the staves and buttresses of the wharf. The water washed over a bank of tin kettles, old shoes, broken dishes, dead cats, and decayed vegetable matter of various kinds.

Suchlike contributions to the river sent up powerful smells. The inhabitants of the riverside houses were either destitute of the olfactory nerve, or were stoically indifferent to such material matters. Hygienic principles were abhorred by the nation in these parts, and the visit of a sanitary inspector was regarded with little less disgust than that of a tract distributor or evangelical parson. Billy had the odour of rum yet in his nostrils, having breakfasted on the raw spirit. Naturally he swore lustily at some impending obstacle which he had failed to observe on the slimy steps. He narrowly escaped tumbling over this drifted wood into the abyss of fetid mud beneath. At a short distance from the shore there lay a grain vessel from Riga, which he was employed in unloading. The morning mists hung so heavily that he could only see the outline dimly, though he could hear the crew rattling chains and hauling about the cargo. In these low latitudes humanity is at work long before dawn. You who grow and live like the lilies of the field, without toiling or spinning, are asleep on your downy couches, and know nothing of early labours which minister to your well-being. The raw nipping airs that wander

about the river in the early morning would shrivel up such hot-house plants very shortly. The sweep of Billy's lighter swings softly to and fro in the running tide. You can hear the swish of the water against the barge's sides. On the lowest step of the wharf Billy stands aghast. There is a most unlikely-looking occupant in the stern of his barge. He frowns fiercely, bringing his heavy black eyebrows down in a way that denotes danger, opening his mouth for the coming of a mighty oath. Apparently none to suit the occasion is in readiness, or, it may be, the object is unworthy of the effort. He stands on the step with his lips parted, and a little barefooted girl, with a ragged remnant of a red shawl drawn round her, looks towards him and smiles fearlessly. Billy stifles the malediction. He does not remember a child ever smiling at him before. His shoe-leather is notorious in his court; and though it is not on record that he ever struck a woman or kicked a child, he gets credit for the capability of performing such actions under temptation. His bloodshot gray eyes continue to stare at the tranquil atom, which is perched like a fly on the edge of the barge. He could crush her beneath his hand. The child still goes on rocking her body backwards and forwards with the motion of the boat, smiling placidly all the time. She is quite unaware of any misdemeanour or trespass.

'Tain't bad here—sort o' see-saw,' she remarks.

She has calm hazel eyes and dark-brown curls, damp with the morning mists. She is pale and thin, pitifully thin as regards arms and legs. Her clothing is scanty, showing blue bony limbs through rents and tatters. No remnant of a hat or covering shelters her

head from the cold air. Protection for the extremities is not demanded as a necessity by a rudimentary civilisation. Billy knew nothing about children individually. Collectively, he was aware that they were a nuisance, justly cursed and ill-used by their masters and parents. They had the knack, as I have said, of keeping out of his way in the filthy courts and slums of the vicinity. That any brat should dare to take liberties with him was an outrageous novelty. He pushed his oilskin cap back and scratched his shock head. The fumes of liquor were yet in his brain. Was he dreaming? He drew the lighter by its chain towards him, and tumbled clumsily into it.

'Well, now! who are yer?'

'Dunno!' said the child, looking over intently into the water.

'How did yer get here?'

'I runned away and falled down in the dark. There warn't no moon, and yer don't seem to have gas hereabouts.'

Billy is satisfied of a real presence, and kicks objectively at some loose sacks at his feet.

'I'm dommed! Yer might hev been drowned. Wheer does yer hail from?'

'Don't hail anywheres,' says the maiden, with contemptuous accent.

'Who's yer mother?'

'Dunno.'

Billy finds the cross-examination of this daring little trespasser an arduous mental effort. He sits down on the edge of the barge.

'Yer a cussed little limb. Now be off wi' yer. Git along home.'

Here the bargee lifts one of his leg-of-mutton fists, threatening her. The child eyes him a moment steadily, and then bursts into a shriek of weird laughter.

'I ain't afeard o' yer. I ain't agoin' yet. I likes this 'ere place.

I ain't ever been on ship-board afore. There's lots to look at.'

Billy's huge paw drops. The confident fearless gaze of the atom surprises him. He resumes his examination in a milder tone.

'Wheer does dad work? He ain't one o' my mates, I knows.'

'Ain't got no dad.'

A silence for a few seconds, in which Billy hears the child's teeth chatter. A bright idea of forensic artifice visits his dull mind. He is on another tack now.

'Wheer did yer come from last?'

'Sall Grabham's.'

This time Billy is exasperated beyond any linguistic eloquence or persuasion. Getting up, he approaches the child, and lays his heavy hand upon her thin little shoulder, pulling her roughly to her feet. To his surprise, she is tall, coming up to his middle—a girl of eight, or ten more probably.

'Cuss yer! Go back to Sall Grabham's.'

The child resists his pressure with all her might, wrenching herself from beneath his clasp, and making a lunge at him with the hand that is free. Billy had never known such a small antagonist, and the absurdity of the situation seemed slowly to communicate itself to his intelligence.

'You let alone. I aren't a-doin' no harm here. I'll bide along o' you a bit. I wants something to eat. I ain't had nought to put inside me since yesterday mornin'. Mother Solomon she guv me two happles off her stall. My, they was nice red uns! Last night Sall Grabham she leathered me a bit with Dicky Dodd's strap, and then she chivied me out of our street.'

'That's a dommed lie, young kid! There aren't no Grabhams in Blackfriars.'

She snapped her little fingers at the huge ruffian who stood over her.

'Bless yer, I don't come from these parts. Our cellar it's Westminster way. Sall Grabham she were married to my dad, and he went and hunged hisself, and she went along o' Dicky Dodd the same day as the corony's inquest. She aren't nought to me, and I ain't agoin' to prig things for the likes of her. 'T might be different if I rightly b'longed her. I don't seem at no time to have b'longed to any ones.'

The childish speculation as to antecedents goes no further. Billy is rather entertained with the boldness and rapid oratory of his visitor. Like Moses, he is slow of speech himself. Her pluck and sturdy resistance tells upon him. A very unusual grin of approval widens his square jaw. Somewhere beneath every human shell there is a humorous nerve, though we do not always find the right straw wherewith to tickle it. Billy goes down on his knees, and fumbles about for a tin bottle stowed away somewhere.

'It's mighty cold of a mornin', young kid. Hev a taste o' lightning? So yer've been here since last night. I guess yer well chilled.'

The clear eyes anxiously scan the man's manoeuvres. When he produces a dirty red handkerchief, tied up at the corners, the child's perturbation is evident.

'I'm used to all weathers. 'Tain't much of a matter to me a-sleepin' out of a night. Them there sacks o' yourn was warm and comfortable, and Dicky Dodd warn't nigh to larrup me. Wos that?'

A very hungry gleam disturbs the composure of the philosophical eyes. The man holds out a tin mug in his dirt-begrimed hand. According to his views, this is the first step of hospitality. She sniffs cautiously.

'Don't like its smell?'

'It's lightning.'

The man cackles hoarsely, with evident enjoyment of her disapproving looks.

'It's dang'rous to touch lightning'. Dicky Dodd he tells as he'd wonst a brother as were burnt to a cinder with lightning'. Don't think that 'ud be nice.'

Billy winks at 'an imaginary audience over the water, insinuating the mug persuasively.

'Mine always do smell wonnerful strong. It are perwided express from the clouds for me and my pals. Now do'ee try a drop.'

The child takes a gulp of the raw spirit, chokes, coughs, and bursts into angry sobs.

'Yer wants to see me—blowed—up to them clouds. O, O, O! I'll be a cinder! O, it do burn my inside terrible!'

Billy is unequal to doing any battle of words at this crisis, and drinks off the mug of spirit at a draught, by way of proving to this blubbering damsel the innoxious nature of the compound. She watches him out of one eye not hidden in the ragged shawl.

'Ah, yer inside ain't made so delicate-like as wimmen's.'

The notion of this 'woman's' inside is apparently overwhelming, for Billy once more gives voice to harsh mirth.

'G—d A'mighty! yer is a rum un! What does they call yer?'

'Loo.'

'Nought besides?'

'Bless yer, who wants more nor one name! What hev yer got in that hankercher?'

'Saveloys and bread for dinner. Would ye like a snack? Yer about as thin as Job's turkey.'

Without any further persuasion Miss Loo lays siege to Billy's dinner. To his immense surprise and admiration she steadily works her way through the whole of this solid meal.

'Never trust me if I ever seed a dinner go so slick! Yer don't need to carry a nosebag when yer goes out of a night, for yer can stow away enough for a week at wonst.'

Miss Loo is not at all disconcerted by such reflections on her appetite. In her state of life such remarks are mostly accepted as complimentary.

'Now I'm a-goin' back to Grabham's; I guess as the babby hev begun squallin' afore this. I shall come agen, and you can give me trotters next time; or I likes s'rumps or winkles, I ain't per-tickler. I say, though, I think as how you'd best let that light-nin' alone.'

She skipped lightly over the bags and made her way upwards. With a dubious expression of amusement, mystification, and anger on his face, Billy watched her pick her way up the slippery steps. She even lifted her short rag of a petticoat with a gesture of disgust as she stepped over a loathsome carcass. Looking down at him from the summit, she waved her thin hand with condescending patronage.

'Good-bye to yer. Yer ain't a bad chap, and them sausingers has made me comf'abler. I'll come agen, never you fear.'

A hoarse guffaw broke from the bargee as he loosened his chain and floated out into mid-stream. Long before the following Saturday morning he had forgotten his strange visitor and her promise to return. His astonishment to see her once more at break of day located in his lighter was great.

'Hullo, Spindleshanks, here agen?'

'I come early a purpose to put yer in mind of them trotters. Yer'll be flush of cash to-night, if yer ain't now.'

Billy grinned with delight at

this proof of the atom's astuteness. He put his hands into his pockets and turned them out.

'Not a blessed mag! Hev Sall Grabham been a keel-hauling of yer agen?'

'Wos that sinnify! She hev been a-pokering me this time. Red-hot it were. Look here.'

Hereupon Miss Loo, not troubled with any superfluity of modest shame, lifts her rags, and reveals some inches above her knee a hideous scar of burnt flesh, still blistered and raw. A strange look passed across the man's face at the sight of this grievous mark. He drew a long breath.

'Blast her, she must be a bad un to treat a little un so! What were it for?'

Billy's interest in the child's domestic circumstances is evidently increasing.

'Cos Jeremy and me we took the babby to Battersea to them gardings there. I carried him all the way myself, and he are heavy; but lor! it were pretty to hear him crow at them flowers. He hadn't never seen a flower afore.'

'Who the Dickens are Jeremy and the babby?'

The child gazed speculatively up and down the river, and then her look came back to Billy.

'I don't rightly know. The babby he were bringed by Sall, and she says he don't b'long to no one but her. Mrs. Flanagan she says he were my dad's, and some says as he's Dicky Dodd's. I don't understand the rights o' babbies, they're all queer-like. There's some as hev a dad, and some as hasn't. Jerry he's another like me, wi' only one name and not rightly b'longing to any one.'

The bargee turned a quid of tobacco in his mouth, and looked away from the calm eyes of the



deliberating philosopher, trying to establish the mystery of 'bab-bies' on some stable ground. I fancy that such low-bred ruffians do occasionally know a feeling akin to shame.

Miss Loo meanwhile closely examines the bargee's features. After a lengthy scrutiny she decides he is worthy of an entire confidence.

'I say, I'm a goin' to be a nuss-gal next week. Think o' that luck! Mrs. Flanagan as lives in our street has a sister as is a greengrocer wi' twins, which is more nor she can manage wi' cabbages and tu'nips. They'll give me my grub and keep me in clothes.'

'You a nuss-gal! How old is yer?'

'Sall Grabham she telled Mrs. Flanagan as I were nigh on twelve, but Jeremy he says as I hev allus been younger nor him by two year. It don't make much matter. I say, wos yer name?'

'Billy—Willyum Davis.'

'O, yer a swell cove wi' two names! Yer must hev b'longed to some one. Are yer married?'

'No.'

Much surprise is pictured on Billy's face.

'An' yer don't live along o' any one? No wimmen with yer?'

Such a matter of every-day experience to Loo was 'living along o' some one,' that there was no reason to regard it as a condition of impropriety to be minced finely in the way of speech. Billy can look the child in the face.

'No young kid?'

Then, as though an afterthought of resentment towards her inquiry had visited him, he added, in a growl,

'What's that to you?'

'Hev yer none as rightly b'longs to yer at all—none as keeps house for yer?'

'Not a hindividual.'

'Then s'pose I b'longs to yer?'

Billy does not meet this downright offer with the enthusiastic gratitude looked for.

'Don't yer see, when I am out nussing, I can come and see yer often, and bimeby I'll be yer sweetheart. I think yer a good sort o' chap.'

Billy rubs his rough face all over and kicks at a cask at his feet. The absurdity of the proposition does not seem to strike him. He is wondering in his own slow way what can have induced this frail little creature to take a fancy to him. Her superior wit and intelligence amuse him, and a certain dictating tone of address seems to declare that she considers him under her protection.

No answer to Loo.

'Don't yer like the looks on me, Willyum Davis?—O lor, what a mouthful! Bless yer, when I get a new gownd wi' flounces, and washes my face, I won't be so bad to look at, though I aren't got much colour to speak on.'

Miss Loo estimates her pallid complexion as a weak point. She is piqued now, and appraises her charms with decided asperity. Still Billy only looks at her with a ruminating gaze, while his horny hand continues to rub his face mechanically.

'Very well, Willyum Davis, I sha'n't ask to b'long to yer agen. I'll keep company along o' Jeremy as soon as he's grewed up. He'll be a cut above you. I means him to be a market-gardener, and I won't hev nought to say to them as carries greasy tubs, and doesn't wash not even o' Sunday. I wish as I'd never eat them sausingers o' yourn—I do, I do. I wish I'd hev tumbled into the river and hev had a corony's inquest, like my dad, or runned away with yer boat.'



Then there is a lull, during which Loo gathers her linguistic forces together. Billy takes the opportunity of putting in a word of pacification.

'I ain't got no objection to yer comin' here at times. You're a reg'lar spitfire and a rare one to talk, and I likes nouse. I aren't got no sweetheart neither, and perhaps by and by I'll take yer out to walk o' Sundays, but yer rather a little un yet. Here's a bit of old horse yer can tuck into; junk is better nor nought. Maybe if yer comes agen next week I'll have a horange. I'd clean forgot as yer were comin' agen. Will yer like to hear the tale of the Merry Dun of Dover while yer head's in the rack?'

Loo assented with dignity to be diverted by Billy's yarn during her meal.

'The Merry Dun it were a ship so big that in passing through Dover Straits her flying jibboom it knocked down Callay's steeple, and a whole flock o' sheep was swep off Dover cliff by the fly o' her ensign. She were so high that a youngster as was sent up to the mast-head were a gray old bloke when he reached the deck agen. There's summat like a ship to see, for ye!'

'That's all my eye, Willyum Davis. Don't yer think I'll swaller them thumpers. If yer a-goin' to make game of me, I'll not come agen.'

However, that was only a threat on Miss Loo's part, and the provision-locker of Billy's barge paid heavy duty for her visits on many subsequent occasions. It is only fair to add that, as time went on, and the 'nuss-gal' was better fed at home, her appetite diminished. Miss Loo by degrees became the proud possessor of a wardrobe; and Billy, under her tuition, made acquaintance with the names of

various articles of feminine apparel, as they appeared on her small person, and also the colours which she considered suited her 'taller cheeks,' as she derisively condemned her pallid complexion. The girl, as she grew in stature and wit, grew also in favour with the bargee. She opened out new interests, new views, in his hitherto limited mental walks. All his life he had been travelling round in a circle of vicious pleasures and low sights. On Bank-holidays Loo took charge of him, and escorted him once to Madame Tus-saud's, another time to the Kensington Museum, and in the summer to Epping Forest. At last all the pleasure of Billy's life was centred in the city-bred waif which had drifted up against him. It was a strange tie which united this dissimilar pair. Loo was the guide and counsellor, and the great hulking bargee meekly submitted to the tyranny of the frail young girl who had attached herself so strangely to him. There was no word of love or courtship between them; but by the time Loo was fifteen it was understood that Billy Davis was 'keeping company' with the tall slip of a girl occasionally seen walking out with him on Sundays. Much irreverent chaff was blown about amongst the bargees in reference to the matter, and disappointed spinsters were bitter in their depreciations of the stranger's charms; for Loo never associated with the district society, holding herself altogether superior to the 'water nymphs.'

Loo is slight and thin even at sixteen. She looks more slender than ever when seen tripping along by the huge bargee's side. The girl has graduated in many schools of adversity, such as cruelty, starvation, and unwholesome atmospheres; but through them

all has contrived to retain a certain delicate prettiness approaching refinement. In her condition of life it is unusual, and not approved of. Rough mistresses disparage her services because of her small hands and incapable hips and shoulders. Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, she is an active quick-handed young person, with more than the average amount of intelligence and honesty. Her integrity and obliging disposition are two qualities not called into question by the most sharp-spoken virago. The children and babies always cling fondly to Loo; for she can sing sweetly, and tell stories of most fantastic and marvellous events. Her imagination certainly mocks the meat it feeds on, for over the kitchen fire she deals out to a round-eyed group of urchins the most astounding narratives of flood and field. It would be difficult to say where Loo had picked up her notions, which were as wild and improbable as Jules Verne's inventions. Scraps from the newspapers, street conversations, reminiscences of early life, are woven together by her active mind in perpetually new combinations. Billy's Merry Dun of Dover sinks into insignificance beside the achievements of fancy. She is now a general servant in a cheap lodging-house in a by-street of Westminster. Loo can never be induced to take service far from the river, though she has had more than one superior situation offered her in remote highways.

It is Sunday afternoon, and Loo comes down a cranky staircase arrayed in her most magnificent attire. Her little feet have now both shoes and stockings, and her gown boasts as many flounces as she can desire.

'My word, Loo, but you look quite a genteel young person when

you're cleaned up! To be sure, them red roses do suit your pale complexion wonderful! Are you going to chapel?'

'No, ma'am,' replies Loo serenely, looking over the head of her buxom mistress.

'O mother, Loo goes to meet her sailor sweetheart o' Sundays. I'd be ashamed to have such a ugly chap.'

At this Miss Loo turns a look of fiery anger at the small feminine critic, and passes onwards in silence.

Not far from Westminster Bridge this smartly-attired young person is met by an acquaintance of a type not uncommon hereabouts. Loo salutes this hybrid individual, whose amphibious nature is evident to a discerning eye, with a nod of triumphant coquetry. Our old friend Billy Davis is singularly metamorphosed. He wears a jersey, and his nether garments are fresh from the peg of an outfitter's. He is moreover washed and combed. The anchors and crosses tattooed on his huge hands are even discernible against a lighter background. He approaches Loo with a sidling motion, indicative, in his condition of life, of amorous sentiments. His small gray eyes have still occasionally a ferocious gleam, but the wild animal is fairly tractable and docile. He answers well to Loo's bit, on the whole, rarely jibbing.

'Here I am at last, Willyum. Have yer been a waitin' long? Them dratted children does make such a sight of cleaning up at our place. Mrs. Reilly she do slave and slave herself and me, between lodgers and brats; but it aren't no use wi' such shoals on 'em, for all the world like s'rimps in a pint pot—s'rimps unboiled, for ever a-jumpin' about a-singin' out as they're alive. Where are we going?'

Billy expresses his indifference ; so Miss Loo slips her hand through his arm, and walks him in the direction of the Abbey.

'What do yer think o' my gownd?' Here Miss Loo smirks round at an avalanche of flounces suspended airily behind her by a butterfly clip.

'A new un?' Billy says, casting an eye up and down. 'I thought yer looked pretty jimpish as yer comed along.'

'Mrs. Reilly she guv it me. It are one of herold uns; but I done it up to look pretty tidy.'

'Loo, yer must think o' leaving Mrs. Reilly.'

'O Willyum, what are you a-sayin' of?—and them so good as never was, with every Sunday out a bit.' Hereupon Loo withdrew her hand sharply from his arm.

'My gal, I've something pertickler to say to yer. Ye knows as I arn't much of a one at the gab, but your knowledge-box mostly takes in my meaning without need o' many words.'

A long pause, and Billy draws a deep breath as if gathering his reserve battalions of expression together. Perhaps Loo knew what was coming, for she walked slowly, casting down her fearless eyes.

'Loo, you knows as I ain't a flash young chap as such as you might look for, but yer b'longs to me since ye were a little un, and, Loo, I'd murder any man as 'ud come atween us! I ain't never said nought of it afore, but I think it's about time we was spliced. I've been a-turnin' it over many a day and night. Yer not a little un any longer, though by the Lord A'mighty it seems like t'other morning only as I found yer a-sitting so cool and easy in my lighter, and a cheekin' me for all the world as

if you was my size. I were a rare lapper in them days, and you were a reg'lar woolled un to stand up to me then; I might have pitched yer into the river.'

Billy passed his great hand over his eyes.

'Yer've made murder ever since o' my bad ways wi' yer jobations and obstinations. To think as Billy Davis sh'u'd water his liquor, save his earnin's, and be a think-in' o' gettin' married! Haw, haw! Loo, you and me will be rare and happy. 'I won't be long before I'm one o' the long-shore folks. Our barge will sail down the river and round the Essex flats, and I'll learn yer to steer, my beauty. Loo, fix a day.'

The soft April breeze blows Loo's wavy hair into her eyes, and for once she is silent and discomposed. Her heart is beating wildly. They are walking round the Abbey yard, and the strains from the organ within reach their ears from time to time. At last Loo regains her self-possession, and is able to find words. Later on, as they wander by the riverside in the gathering dusk, Billy gets her consent to a marriage in May.

There was no elaborate *trousseau* to be purchased, or settlements to be drawn out. They neither of them had relations to consult, or any of the ceremonial forms of a higher civilisation to endure. You may be very sure that they neither of them looked for wedding presents to help to set up housekeeping.

April slipped past, and the great day came on which they were to be bound together. The union was not cemented precisely in accordance with the orthodox views of such proceedings, yet quite as satisfactorily and respectably to themselves. The moral obligation of matrimony was ful-

filled, and they were indissolubly 'spliced.' They went through a brief ceremony before a registrar, and when they came out of the office Billy put a gold ring on the girl's finger.

Loo made much ostentatious parade of this link during the day. How fine she was on this bright morning, in a gray alpaca gown with voluminous blue trimmings! Her pretty wavy hair shone with additional brushing, and her pale face had an unusual flush of excitement.

This young person had stipulated that Billy should 'do the thing proper,' and be married in a pair of white ducks. These garments he had cheapened at a mart of 'reach me down' notoriety, to the satisfaction of the feminine on-looker of his proceedings through the window.

They went to Rosherville Gardens for the day, Mrs. Loo's observant ear having heard them cited as the place to spend a happy one. Billy borrowed an old tub of a boat from a waterman of his acquaintance, and rowed his bride to the scene of their holiday.

Loo was vastly interested in Greenwich, and greatly amazed at the miles of masts sheltered in the docks to the north. They hugged the shore closely to avoid large vessels and barges, and naturally the girl's flowery head-gear and gay gown made her the target of frequent witticisms from the loafers and watermen; but her calm brown eyes looked over their heads with serene imperturbability, as though she heard them not.

The newly-married pair dined sumptuously in a booth at 'a bob a nob.' The bride drank water, and Billy beer. He would fain have capped his pewter measure with a glass of spirits, but Mrs.

Loo pulled his sleeve and shook her head vigorously.

'What, yer've got me in tow, have yer! Come along then, old lady. 'Twon't do to cross yer.'

They promenaded the grounds, pausing frequently to wonder at strange shrubs or to marvel at plaster statues. I am not sure that Apollos and Venuses did not rather scandalise the bride. Loo forgot her wedding-ring entirely at last, and stood clapping her hands in childish delight before a merry-go-round.

'Hev a ride, miss!' said the proprietor, in cajoling tones to this likely-looking spectator.

She drew herself up with sudden dignity, while Billy haw-hawed in delight.

'She are but a young un, to be sure, but she's my missis.'

O, the pride in that word missis! and O, the sweet shy shame wherewith the young wife cast down her eyes!

In a lovely sunset they rowed homewards, past the low line of Kentish hills blue with nodding hyacinths, past snug little Erith with its covey of yachts preparing to spread wings shortly, back towards the smoke and Blackfriars.

Something like mist obscures Loo's clear eyes when they reach the wharf.

'O,' she said, with a long-drawn sigh, as Billy lifted her carefully out of the boat and carried her up the slippery steps, 'I wish as all days 'ud be as happy as this!'

He had landed her at the familiar wharf where she had first come to him. He reminded her of it now, holding her close to him in the darkness.

'My beauty, yer said then as yer'd b'long to me; and, O Lord, to think as your talk has all come true!'

The girl clings closely to his arm as he guides her to his dwell-

ing through the intricacies of the narrow streets. It is new to see her dependent or shy, and in this rough bargee's heart there rises a feeling he hardly understands. A pure fount of stronger love and tenderness springs up for the helpless thing willing to trust him and be subject to him. Loo's attitude wakes in him all the highest instincts of manhood. On their way they are both silent, for their hearts are full of the hush and awe of deep feeling. Do not deride this poor tale of a low-lived humanity, or cling to that false doctrine which declares sensibility and deep human affections the developments of education and culture. If you are, indeed, of those who believe that school-boards, fine art societies, and so forth can produce fine feelings and deep passions, poor is your faith. As old as the hills, as eternal as the heavens, are the voices and instincts of love, and Nature gives no class monopoly of her noblest virtues and passions. At the corner of Billy's street there is a fight going on. A brutal ruffian is kicking his wife, and neighbours are looking on at the exciting spectacle without daring to interfere. Loo turns very white with a sudden terror knocking at her heart. Her joy had been so full, and the delicious tumult within so strange and sweet. Now a ghastly shadow rose up suddenly. Was some presentiment of her doom suffered to visit her? Billy could not see how deathly pale she was, but he could feel her tremble and totter. He forces her through the crowd, supporting her, rapping out a volley of curses against obstructionists on the pavement.

Lifting Loo in his mighty arms at the foot of the staircase of his home, he carries her up as if she was a baby, only setting her

on her feet when he has reached the highest story. Then he takes the key of his room from his pocket and bids her to enter. He goes forward himself to strike a light, while Loo stands on the threshold of her new home. It is a large airy attic, well scrubbed and newly papered, and furnished with a degree of decency and comfort not frequent in this quarter of the town. Billy has laboured hard to gather together useful and ornamental objects for Loo's home. The bride—shy, pale, very lovely, with the wild terror of the sickening sight below still lingering in her eyes—takes a step or two forwards, and falls into the arms of her husband. She hides her head upon his breast, and quick and low come the panting words—

'O Billy—now—as I b'longs to you for always—as I'm yours to do as you please with—say as you'll never go for to treat me so cruel as some wives is treated! Remember as I gived myself to you—a-trustin' you—and a-lovin' you—more nor all the world!'

Loo's honeymoon was a series of halcyon days, and Billy was an exemplary bridegroom for days and weeks subsequently. Loo has been married five months now, and up in her attic she sings over her work from morning till night. She is a model little housekeeper, and takes in sewing to fill leisure hours. Billy thinks she must be dull and moped, and plans Sunday excursions nearly every week. One Saturday evening he took her to a theatre, where the most exciting melodrama harrowed up Loo's soul to the verge of producing hysterics. On another occasion he escorted her to a 'twopenny hop.' This diversion, however, was not successful, and was productive of much uneasy feeling in Bill's

mind. This entertainment was, according to custom, held in a public-house, and was the scene of much vulgar romping and coarse hilarity. The rude jokes and wild revelry were beyond Loo's comprehension or appreciation. Her clear eyes looked so terrified and amazed at the customary proceedings that Billy very soon took her away. Moreover, he was himself moved to wrath by a too great readiness on the part of his mates to seek Loo's companionship.

'So this is yer missis, Bill Davis, as yer've been a-hidin' of under a skylight. She's onny a poor bit of muslin. Cheer up, my dear; don't yer let him keep yer under lock and key. Yer as white as a clean shirt. Hev a drop of summat? I'll stand treat, to put some roses in them cheeks. Hev yer got a pardner for the jig? That'll shake a bit of life into yer.'

Loo edged away from this mate of Bill's, who extended muscular arms to grip her waist, leering at the same time with a much-approved expression of persuasion. Turning her eyes to find her husband, she sees a bold-faced girl touch Billy's arm and whisper something in his ear. Blasphemous curses, such as she had never heard before from him, fell from his lips, and then he said hoarsely,

'None o' your lip, Molly. I'll leave the ten commandments on your face if you dares to speak that sort to her!'

The brazen-browed damsel is in nowise disconcerted. She places her hands upon her hips, opening her wide mouth to give voice to a hoarse bray of derision. She calls out to a companion, whose violent efforts in the jig are temporarily suspended,

'Look 'ere, Biddy Murphy, here's Billy Davis on a new tack!

Look at our slasher as drinks six water-grog nowadays! He's a-standin' wi' his tail down afore his missis!'

The freckled red-haired Biddy thus adjured by her friend turns instead, and looks at Loo. She sees the girl averting her face from her coarse admirer; sees, too, that Loo is younger and more innocent than they all are. Meeting Loo's brown eyes flashing indignation, Biddy turns fiercely on her friend.

'Bad scan to ye, Molly! Let the girl be. It maybe Billy's in better luck than wi' the likes o' ye. If he'd ha' taken up with ye, likely enough he'd ha' been climbing the everlasting staircase for tryin' to murder ye!'

The next instant the thick-limbed lady is whirled away in the grasp of a furious jigger, and is kicking up her heels in his company more vigorously than ever. Bill's mates crowded about Loo, and made her the object of much remark. Being several ranks below the social grade which takes pride in other men's attentions to their wives, his anger began to rise. As he walked home beside her he determined Loo should go to no more 'hops.' That he was given to jealousy he did not know. He had never had cause for it before. Yet one more brutal passion, even growing out of love, it was given to this violent nature to experience. Once or twice Loo had wondered at his stern looks towards her when, on Saturday nights, he escorted her on a marketing expedition. If she paused to haggle with a costermonger for Sunday's dinner, perhaps the vendor of fish or sausages would pay her some airy compliment on her astute perception of stale viands, or would allude to her youthful appearance and surprising house-



keeping capacity. After that, as he slouched along the pavement beside her, Billy's face would wear an ugly expression. On most evenings Billy came home to tea; but occasionally a gang of dock labourers, or some old water companions, would waylay him, and carry him off to some well-known haunt. One night the clocks were striking nine when he found himself in his own street. He had been drinking, and, for the first time since his marriage, reeled slightly in his walk. He was conscious of his condition, and went home with a dull remorse weighing upon him. This was the first relapse since that happy day at Rosherville, and Billy's newly-awakened conscience was heavy. The great hulking figure crept quietly up the dark staircase. He staggered once or twice, and once he hit his head against the wall, but yet he made no noise.

'Reef yer top-sail, Bill,' he said to himself as he rubbed the bruise. At the top of his landing he can see a light. The attic has a little window in the wall, which gives light to the staircase during the day. It is only a square of four small panes, and Loo, when Billy is at home, draws a curtain over it. No one else lives on this landing to need the guidance of light. Billy pauses at the window to look in. What will Loo be doing? he vaguely wonders. The tea-things are waiting for him on the table, as he expects; but there is something within that he does not expect to see, and that causes him to start back suddenly. He holds fast by the wall, and in his stupefied eyes a sudden dangerous light flares up. He checks his newly-awakened rage for a space, drawing back to take a long breath before, with an air of surprising caution,

he bends forward again to peer through the little aperture. The hum of eager voices is audible, though not the words of the speakers. O woe, that they cannot see that awesome spectre with the lurid glare in his eyes crouching as if prepared to spring! Sweet Loo, flushed and excited, with tear-drops yet on her eyelashes, lays her hand upon a soldier's shoulder—a man who kneels, sobbing, against the table, with his face hidden upon her work-basket. The flames in Billy's eyes gleam fitfully with an evil murderous light, and while he watches, the thick veins on his neck and forehead swell and stand out like knotted cords. Blood careers in a wild stream to his brain, till at last he can hardly see, while his breath comes ever thicker and shorter. He pants and gasps for breath when Loo's hand rests for an instant on the red coat. He wrenches his neck-tie off, for he is choking with the effort to contain himself. As Loo's clear eyes drop tears his broad chest heaves wildly with his heart's mad beats. Swiftly, suddenly had this terrible sight come upon him, and swiftly, suddenly had the demon of furious avenging love thrust itself before him. He was drunk with spirits indeed, but, alas, more drunk with the vile passion of a raging jealousy! O, what a lovely light of tender pity in Loo's eyes! O, what a sweet low voice of comfort in hers as she speaks! The pity of it that Billy only sees the light to misread it, and does not hear the words!

'I will help yer; I will give yer all I've got in the house. Billy 'ull not mind if I tells him as I giv'd the money to Jeremy. He knows all about yer, as yer was kind to me at Grabham's. O lad, them mis'r'ble days is all



over for me. But, Jeremy, don't yer never go for to steal agen. If you puts the money back this time, maybe's it 'ull be a warnin' to yer.'

Yes, this is Loo's companion of earlier days. Jeremy had gone years ago as a drummer-boy into the army, and his soldiering fortunes had later on carried him into the line. It was years since Loo had seen him ; but, in his trouble, he had been at some pains to hunt her out. Now he had come to her for help. He had stolen money from an officer's table, and had spent it in a riotous debauch. Awakened the next day to the knowledge of disastrous consequences, he sought assistance to replace it. The poor weak lad had laid his story before his old girl comrade, and besought her pity in the most abject terms.

The bargee lay in ambush, as still as death, save for his hoarse breathing. The fierce glitter in his eyes could not be put out, and every tense muscle in his huge limbs throbbed with the desperate ache of restrained forces. To him it seemed as though his skin was everywhere a ligature too tight to endure. The bursting sensation of murderous anger kept down is a pain akin to no other. Each of his rough hands was closed firmly into the similitude of an iron knob. The effort to wait and wreak a more terrible vengeance could scarcely be prolonged.

At last it is over. The raging eyes, devouring every movement of the pair within, see Loo point to the door, after placing the contents of *his* canvas bag in the soldier's hands. Billy does not hear her say,

'Go now, and put it back at wonst. To-morrow yer can come and thank Willyum, not ma. I'll make it clear wi' him. He never

were one to be mean in the way of helpin' a unfortunate chap.'

Loo's gesture of dismissal is to Billy's jealous frenzy a proof as strong as Holy Writ, probably a good deal stronger. She is sending this man away by an indication of her husband's probable return. As Jeremy rises from his kneeling posture Billy drops back into the dark angle of the wall. In this way he misses the sight of the boyish face—a poor weak face it is—with red eyelids and sickly complexion. The soldier comes out quickly, leaving the door ajar behind him. With the light yet in his eyes, he does not discern a figure crouching low in the corner. Billy is in no hurry to settle with the man—Loo's lover—for all his most bitter fury is directed against his wife. His slow brain, excited by strong liquor, turns round and round the thought of her guilt, till proof of a damnable nature seemed to stand out clear before him. The soldier might have paid her many visits in his absence. This kind of thing might have gone on for days, weeks, months. This poor besotted bargee was mad with the indescribable anguish of a terrible jealousy. In his stupid brain only one construction of Loo's looks and actions could form itself. He heard the soldier's steps go down flight after flight of the staircase. How many steps there seemed to-night ! Surely the flights had never been so long before. On the flags below at last the man's steps die away, and silence reigns in the darkness of the house beneath. Surely the darkness is blacker than it ever was before ; most certainly the street below is preternaturally still. A far-away clock chimes the half after nine. Billy crept forward for the last time, and looked in at the window. A

board creaked beneath his heavy boot, but Loo, standing before the fireplace, is putting the kettle on, and does not hear it. She stands, looking dreamily into the glowing coal without moving, when she has placed it. Her hands are clasped loosely before her, and she looks anxious and sorrowful. Something in her attitude increased the hunger of Billy's love. He moistened his dry lips with his tongue, he unclasped his hands, and then—Loo lifts her hand for a moment to dash away some blinding tears. Billy has never been so late as this since they were married. Is he going back to his old courses? How she wished he was home! Little wife, he is here. What is that brutal inflamed thing, in the likeness of a human face, locking down at her? Whose are those eyes, so wolfish and fierce, with the famished gaze of despairing love? Alas, who can read as love the passionate insanity of jealousy? This is not her husband. Loo starts back aghast from the fiendish giant who stands over her. Too late, my poor girl! He sets his teeth, with an inarticulate sound more like a snarl than any human utterance, and leaps upon the poor frail thing like the wild beast that he now is. He devours her with his eyes, while his great hand is like an iron gag upon her mouth, imposing silence to her probable cries. His breath burns her face; and, in the fury of his rage, evil words, cruel accusations, branding her with the vilest in the street, pour from his lips, accented by curses. Is it for this end, my poor Loo, that God has somehow kept you purer than the rest about you, and has implanted in you strange instincts of goodness which no vile atmosphere can smother? Is it to die at the hands of a

jealous ruffian that you have stretched out saving arms of love to draw the unholy one from his degradation?

Thicker and faster comes the torrent of foul venomous abuse from Billy in the hoarse tones of delirium. Never in all the days of his fighting renown had the 'slasher' of Blackfriars been so terrible to see. Loo's uplifted eyes—as innocent as the day they first met his—though full of terror, yet look up at him. She is afraid, but not ashamed. She cannot open her lips, for he has planted her against the wall, and holds his hand pressed against her lips. He hurts her tender lips—the lips which have always smiled at him, always been loyal in every word. At last there comes a pause. In the silence the poor dumb creature prays, with an agonised glance, for the mercy of speech. Slowly there follows the sentence of her doom.

'Blast yer! I'll put yer light out! I'll break your pretty neck, so as yer shall never bend it over that soldier pal of yourn, and speak lovin' words to him agen! Out of my sight with yer — without a prayer, yer d——d——f'

It is terrible. She is not able to speak a word of explanation.

With one hand he drags her across the room and out of the door, with the other never ceasing to gag her mouth. What is he going to do with her? In their wild despair, her eyes turn to him and pray for the power of a word. He will not look at her any more. Never, O never, will speech be suffered to you again, my poor Loo, until it is too late!

With three strides he has the girl at the door. He stands now at the head of the landing. With a steady purpose, he lifts her slight form above the balustrade, and, with one swift motion

of his mighty arms, hurls her into the abyss of darkness below. Five flights of stairs; think of it! She falls with a dull thud on the stone flagging below. A low suppressed scream breaks across the stillness. A moment's pause, and then the sound of doors opening, and the flash of lights in the darkness beneath, followed by ejaculations and questions.

'What's that?' 'Lord a-mussy, a woman tumbled down drunk!' 'No, it ain't; it's murder!' 'Well, I'm blowed if Billy Davis hev'n't been a-toeing of his missis! I thought it 'ud come to this afore long!' And so on goes the chorus.

The bargee peers timidly over the balustrade at his work, which the lights illuminate. Only a heap of dark clothes lying quite motionless! He falls back. What? His Loo lying there, grievously hurt by him, perhaps done to death! His Loo dead! The pretty thing that had come to him unsought, of her own free will, bestowing the priceless treasure of her love upon him! Little Loo, whom he had cherished from childhood to wifehood, lying below helpless and voiceless, perhaps without ever a smile or joke again for him! Better to have known her sinful. Slowly the light of his madness fades from his eyes. He leans against the wall, shuddering with acute spasms, like one who has a sudden deathly chill. They are moving that inert bundle down-stairs. Billy hears groans, and then a succession of long loud screams. That was surely not Loo's voice—so wild, so despairing, and full of such mortal anguish! The sweat of a great despair pours down the bargee's face. Again he looks over. There are lights upon a table, and two or three women loitering in the passage. The dark

heap is no longer there; but there is a wet and glistening pool where Loo lay before. Is it rain drippings from passengers from the street? That cannot be, for the stars are shining and the pavement is dry.

They have carried the girl into an untenanted room below, and some one gives directions to fetch a doctor. This is evidently something worse than an ordinary case of 'toeing' and the men and women who hang about below speak in whispers now. The doctor comes speedily from a neighbouring street, and Billy, from his post up-stairs, sees his arrival. He hears the echo of Loo's sentence floating about amongst the crowd outside the room where she lies.

'Her face are all smashed in; but that ain't so much matter. Her back it's broke, and she'll be a "stiff un" before morning. I thought as much when I see her doubled up all of a heap.'

Then Billy creeps down the stairs. He is quite sober now, and needs not to hold by the clammy wall, except for the terrible cold chills that now and again paralyse him. The doctor has examined Loo's injuries, and pronounced her doom. But he has not done with her yet. He is accustomed to deal with unruly and lawless people, and coroners are stern in their reproofs towards medical men. There has been foul play here, and he is prepared to deal with it.

'I shall take this woman's deposition, for I believe she has been murdered. There is the mark of a hand upon her throat.'

He looks round the room at the wild crew, at the coarse unsexed women and blackguard men, with a comprehensive glance of scrutiny. None of them flinch before his regard. The guilty one is not here. This crowd has only

gathered together, from neighbouring houses, to see a girl die, and to witness if she dies game, a great matter in these parts. They know that Loo has heard her fate from the doctor. They think that it is more than probable that she will wreak her revenge on her slayer, and, with a dying confession, sign Billy's death-warrant. She was a stranger to most of them, for she had shared no convivial gatherings or rowdy fights, and they were not prepossessed in favour of one who had kept herself aloof. She was a poor-spirited pale-faced chit, and he, Billy Davis, would deserve what he got. He should have taken one of his own sort if he wanted one that would not turn against him. Suddenly at the back of the crowd, in the doorway, an apparition appears—an apparition indeed, for this haggard-faced wild-eyed man looks like one newly risen from the dead. He towers above them all, and his eyes rest upon the still figure lying on the floor of this bare chamber, propped up by a straw mattress, while he draws a long shuddering breath. He asks no questions. The flare of tallow candles, held over Loo's head, shows a long gash down the side of her face and head. There are splashes of blood on the boards. She is conscious, and, as the doctor stoops over her, her eyelids flutter. He is moved by pity; for she is young and delicate-looking, not of the mould of the womankind he is used to deal with. He seeks to revive her sinking senses, bathing her brow and giving her strong salts. In his hand he has paper and pencil, and writes down her words as she answers him.

'What is your name, my dear?'

'Loo.'

'Your surname as well, I mean.'

'Loo. I b'long to Willyum Davis.'

'You are married to him, you mean?'—glancing at her wedding-ring.

'Yes, married'—what a happy smile!—'at the Registry. We went to Rosherville Gardings.' How pitiful the wandering words are!

'How did the accident happen? Who pushed you down the stairs?'

A pause. Loo opens her eyes wide with a supreme effort. What does the question mean? It will harm Billy, surely. O, the dull brain, the giddy senses, and failing nerves! O, for the power to declare him guiltless!

'I—I falled down—in the dark. There warn't no moon, and no lighter to catch me.'

A long, an audible breath of relief passes like a wave over the crowd. They look at one another. After all, Billy would be saved his 'stretching match,' and the girl would die game.

The doctor lifts Loo's head, and administers a cordial. It is a blessed momentary relief, which sends back life to Loo's fluttering pulses. Her purpose is not accomplished yet. She tries to turn her head towards the onlookers. If she is able, she must prove Billy's absence.

'Willyum—has never—come home to-night. Won't one on yer fetch him—from the Neptune—and tell him—gentle—as his Loo is a-dyin', and wants a word with him?'

The crowd parted, as if in answer to her prayer, and Billy made his way towards her. He stooped down beside her, and the girl raised her feeble eyelids, and looked at him with the gladness of satisfied love. The doctor shut up his note-book in perplexity, gazing in speechless surprise at

the pair, who seemed so altogether unconscious of spectators. Was this the look of a woman towards her murderer? Billy lifts her gently from the ground, and lays her across his knees. She does not groan at his touch, though a spasm crosses her face. He holds her close in his great arms, with her bleeding wounded face pressed against his rough cheek. A fluttering sigh of satisfaction stirred her, and even with fast glazing eyes she smiled serenely.

'I'm glad as you comed in time, Billy. I wants to tell yer—as Jeremy hev been to see me sinst yer went away—this mornin'. I gived him some money—from your bag. He were in trouble. He'll tell all to-morrow, when I'm gone. Don't be angered with him—he were good to me when I were a little un. Willyum—I am sorry—as I'm a-goin' to leave yer—and—I wants to tell yer now—as I hev been—very happy sinst I b'longed you. What a pity I falled down agen—in the dark! Don't never go for to say as you—'

With a parting breath of loyalty, little Loo fell back speechless for evermore. Billy's light went out

in his arms, and belongs to another kingdom now. Had she lived here in vain? Ah, who can say?

Billy is degraded now to the lowest rank of profligate bargees. He is dangerous in his cups, and equally so if he is ever out of them. His brawls and brutal assaults are evermore frequent. He is detained for longer periods for the good of his country; but every visit to prison seems to harden him into more desperate ways. He was never tried for Loo's murder. There was none to accuse him, and none had seen that ghastly deed. Has he forgotten his young wife? It is ten years since her light went out; and in these times Billy 'goes along of Molly.' He drowns all recollection in drink; yet now and again I believe there come terrible moments in the early dawn, when, staggering down to his barge, he sees once more a vision of a little child seated there. The light of other days shines with pity upon the poor dissolute wretch out of forgiving eyes, and a voice he never can forget says softly to him, 'I b'longs to you.'

HENRY KING.

## PUIU.

BY THE QUEEN OF ROUMANIA.

(Translated by Helen Zimmerm.)

MANY persons may have read quite recently in the papers how those reporters who travelled with the new Orient Express train from Paris to Constantinople arrived at Bucharest just at the moment when the King and Queen of Roumania were inaugurating their newly-erected summer palace in the Carpathians. Castell Pelesch is the name of this building, whose architecture is a fantastic medley of the Roumanian and mediæval German styles. It owes this name to a chattering mountain stream that foams and tumbles beneath its walls. On its banks the Queen of this land has sat many hours, listening to the fantastic Roumanian folk-tales babbled by the loquacious brook; and the results she has collected into a volume, under the title, *Tales of the Pelesch*. They are, with one exception, the folk-legends of her kingdom, admirably told. The Queen is a gifted poet and story-teller, and under her *nom de plume* of Carmen Sylva has acquired fame in Germany, for she is a German princess, and German is the tongue in which she writes. But she loves her new Fatherland fondly, and is ever anxious to raise it in the opinion of Europe. The last tale in the Pelesch volume is her own invention; she calls it 'Puiu.' It is the Roumanian for my soul, my darling, the name those proud Latins of the East give to their cherished country; and under this name she has written a graceful fairy-tale, with the idea of show-

ing the struggles and difficulties undergone by this newly-created kingdom before it could take its place among its jealous elder brethren.\*

## PUIU.

EARTH was a glorious woman who had many mighty sons and daughters. She was ever thinking how she could render her children happy, and gave to each a garden of his own and a language apart from the rest. The eldest received the warmest, most luxuriant gardens, shaded by palm-trees, into which the sun ever shone. But as they continued to increase, their domains were pushed further away towards the west and north, where the sun did not shine down so warmly, and which, therefore, had to be cultivated with more industry.

Some received gardens in the mountains, others amid the everlasting snows, others on islands in the sea. But there were some of them quite content with their share; and since their strange mother had given to each a special speech, the brothers and sisters did not understand each other well. For this cause, strife and battle often arose among them, and the blood of her own children ran into the maternal lap.

After a while the Earth brought

\* Those interested in stories by the Queen of Roumania are referred to a charming volume of tales from her pen, published this Christmas by Fisher Unwin under the title of *Pilgrim Sorrows*, and also translated by Miss Helen Zimmerm.—Ed. London Society.



forth a lovely little daughter, with large dark eyes shaded by black lashes and arched over by black eyebrows, with a waving forest of dark hair, a row of pearls behind her ruddy lips, a body so slim that it could have been drawn through a ring; and little feet on which she danced along, as though she never touched the ground.

For this, her youngest born, the Earth desired to prepare a fair portion. Between the far-stretching gardens of her powerful brothers, and protected by them, she received a beautiful little domain, bordered by the mountains, a river, and the sea, flooded by the sun, fertilised by the rain, refreshed by the snow; filled with rushing streams, green fields, and smiling vineyards. To this the mother added a soft speech, melodious like music.

Now when charming Puiu danced along singing, a wreath of red flowers pressed on her curly hair, earth and sky, sun and field rejoiced, and all grew and blossomed towards the laughing queen who had no need to move her hand.

But the elder children looked with envy on the fair Puiu, for whom Mother Earth had such a preference that she was wont to serve her best. She forgot that her children ever lived at strife with one another, and therefore would not be good guardians to the tender girl. They were wild and vehement, and whenever the little sister planted her garden, the strong brothers came and robbed her of her fruit and flowers; or they were at strife with one another, and because Puiu's garden lay in their midst they often chose it for their fighting-ground, when it was trodden down sadly and made desert.

Puiu did try to resist her bro-

thers, but in wrestling she was always overcome. Then others came unasked to her aid, who only prolonged the combat and wrenched many a piece of garden from their sister, 'since she was, after all, too weak to plant so much,' they pleaded in their excuse.

At last one brother overcame her wholly, put her in chains, and commanded that she should give into his hands the best things of her garden.

So fair Puiu walked in chains, and her songs sounded so sad that they cut Mother Earth to the heart. She planted her garden indolently and carelessly, for which the brother who had made her his slave scolded and beat her. She looked on indifferently when the other brothers fought in it. No one thought of her. Sometimes they promised to free her, but they always left her in chains as before.

One day she was lying asleep among the flowers. She had laid her arm under her head, so that it rested on her chains. Her long lashes were heavy with tears, and from out her lips ever and anon there stole a sigh, which fled, together with the odour of the flowers, into the dim distance.

Then there sounded from out the deep the voice of the mother, now soft like to a gentle breeze, then ever louder like to rolling thunder. The ground trembled; the sleeper awoke.

'Puiu' sounded the mother's voice, 'why despair thus? Listen to me and learn. In the silent night file your chains slowly, gently, so that no one perceives it, until I give you a signal to let them drop off.'

Many a long night did Puiu file, and in doing so she grew strong and agile, for the chains were well forged and had to be



strongly filed, and yet gently and skilfully that none might perceive it; for once the brother had noticed the filing, and had made the chains stronger than before.

At last the work was done, and Puiu stood upon a mountain-top, awaiting her mother's voice which as yet did not sound, so that she stamped her little feet with impatience, and bit her gleaming plaits of hair with her pearly white teeth.

She still had a memory left of what liberty was like, and she trembled with longing after it.

Then a new strife arose, and one brother stormed through her garden to overwhelm another. But he who had enslaved Puiu stood firm of foot, so that there arose a terrible wrestling between him and the intruder, who was like to be overthrown. Puiu stood by looking on, and raised her arms so that her chains clinked. Then a voice thundered from the depths,

'It is now time!'

With a cry of joy the maid shook free her lovely arms, the chains fell to the ground, and, with a strength she never thought to wield, she tore up a rock, and hurled it into space, striking the brother who had caused her so much woe, and breaking his limbs.

Then she stood up in the sunshine in her full beauty, looked down on the chains at her feet, looked across at her punished oppressor and down into her garden, which for the first time had become her free possession. She smiled, while the bosom of the earth trembled for joy at sight of her lovely child. And from the sea there came a gentle wind that played with her locks and sang a song of triumph through her rustling woods.

But her brothers were overcome

with surprise, and dumbfounded, and would not believe that little despised Puiu had really flung that rock. Most of them were discontent thereat, and began to scold and threaten anew.

'You destroyed my favourite brother.'

'You have spoiled all our pleasure in the great strife.'

'What had you to meddle for? Could you not look on as before?'

Puiu was silent, but touched her arms that so long had borne the heavy chains.

The brothers could not grow accustomed to her awakening, and the victorious one took away a piece of her garden, saying,

'You did not cultivate it.'

The vanquished gave her a piece, saying,

'I could do nothing with it, do you try.'

And all the others began to meddle with her garden, to blame this and that, and demanded of her that she should make it different.

Puiu answered defiantly,

'What does my garden concern you?'

But the brothers seized her two arms, and led her from bed to bed, from path to path, and forced her to plant it thus and not otherwise.

She frowned, and tears of anger welled up into her eyes, but it availed her nothing; the stronger brothers were resolved to break her pride, and held her in their painful iron grip, shaking their weapons, and threatening her with fetters.

At last the weary work was done, and Puiu shook herself free, ran into the mountains, where none would see her, and threw herself weeping on to the ground.

'O mother, mother,' she cried, 'how ill do you act by me! You

have given me a hot heart,  
soaring thoughts, and a lovely  
garden, but added unto them  
weak limbs. Shame and abase-  
ment are my lot. If you desired  
that I should die, why did you  
create me ?

There sounded an answer from  
the deeps, solemn and stern—

‘Have I not protected you  
hitherto ? It was not for naught

that I made you so rich, gave  
you such beauty, such sweet  
speech, and soaring thoughts. You  
are to live and prosper in power  
and dignity, and you will rejoice  
the world with the fulness of  
your fruits.’

Then Puiu raised herself from  
the ground and gazed far out into  
the distance, and in her dreamy  
eyes a great future was reflected.

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### MOONLIGHT.

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GLAD and still I lie, and see the full-orbed moon above,  
Reading in the spangled ether only ‘Love, love, love !’

Living o’er the olden story, this effulgent moon  
Is Diana robed in glory—I’m Endymion.

She has written me this letter, which she holds above ;  
So I read upon the ether only ‘Love, love, love !’

O my queen, my bride elected, look into mine eyes ;  
See my answer there reflected from your starry skies !

## TOLD BY A MARINE.

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THERE was not a smarter man in her Majesty's service than Private Thomas Staples of the Royal Marine Light Infantry, stationed on board her Majesty's ship Cockahoop, in Plymouth Harbour. Whether on duty or off duty; whether going through the bayonet-exercise in review-time, or keeping wicket at a cricket-match; whether in heavy marching order or presiding in his shirt-sleeves at the weekly meeting of the 'Marine Sons of Harmony,' Thomas Staples was the smartest man. Every one said that he would have received his commission long ago but for the fatal stumbling-block that his education had been neglected, and that he could scarcely read, and was utterly unable to write. So Private Thomas Staples he remained, with two medals on his breast, twenty years' service to his credit, and not an entry in the defaulters' book to his debit.

And there was probably no more unpopular and 'better hated' officer in her Majesty's service than Lieutenant Coppin, R.M.L.I., lately appointed to H.M.S. Cockahoop. His very messmates disliked him; for without possessing an atom of brains himself, he was ever laying down the law to men many years his superiors both in service and in age; was conceited, argumentative, and devoted the whole of his energies to the cultivation of his personal appearance and to the exaction of the smallest minutiae of routine and discipline from the men under him. So, from his cantankerous disposition, and his jerky strut-

ting manner, he gained the sobriquet of 'Cocky Coppin.' The very boys in Plymouth called him 'Cocky' as he swaggered along, eyeglass fixed and cane dangling; his brother officers in the gun-room called him 'Cocky' to his face; and the men of course called him 'Cocky' behind his back.

Extremes generally meet; and no other explanation can be given for the fact that ere a month had elapsed since Lieutenant Coppin's appointment to the Cockahoop he and Private Thomas Staples became enemies. To the average martial mind it would seem *infra dig.* for a gentleman and an officer to make an enemy of a humble private; but that Coppin made an enemy of Staples was as patent to every eye as the sunset gun's existence was patent to every ear. The only reason ever given was that Coppin could find no fault with Staples; and men of Coppin's amiable disposition, if they can find no faults, create them. But Coppin had another reason, and a very good one. Christmas-time was approaching, and the men were looking forward to the indulgences usually extended to them at that period—leave for a week to run home, relaxation from duties, suspension of drills, and so on; and Private Thomas Staples was looking forward to spend at least his Christmas Day at the house of a very old friend of his, one Powell, a well-to-do farmer at a village some two or three miles out of Plymouth. Now, Farmer Powell had a fair daughter, Dorance, and to Dorance Tom Staples

had been engaged for more than a year, and to Dorance it was Tom Staples's intention to be married at the end of the year, when he would be entitled to retire from the service with a pension, which, with his savings, would enable him to live comfortably enough, without fear of starvation or the workhouse. Any girl would have been proud of Tom, notwithstanding the forty years he carried, for he was as straight-made and as upright as the drill-sergeant himself, had an honest laugh and a cheery brown face which did any one good to look at, and, better than anything, was a sober, steady, simple-minded fellow who divided his world into two spheres—Duty and Dorance. And the man who would not have been proud of Dorance would scarcely rank as a man. More than one hard-riding young squire, with broad acres and big balances, fell head over ears in love with the pretty girl with the wavy brown hair and the neat ankle, whom they saw milking the cows—farmer damsels milk cows in Devonshire even in these days of æstheticism and higher education—or tending the flowers, as they rode to the meet or walked to cover. And more than one man, with something more than plain 'Mr.' before his name, had asked the farmer for his daughter; but the answer in all cases was the same—'My daughter is engaged, sir. Many thanks for your condescension, and—good day.' For Farmer Powell was one of the old sort, who spoke what he thought, who thought pretty sensibly on subjects which came within his province, and who de-claimed violently in his hard, terse Anglo-Saxon against the prevalent hobby amongst farmers to wander away from their business and explore regions with

which they had nothing to do. 'Dern your politics!' he would say. 'I'm for the Queen and the country and the Church, and I don't want to know nothin' about anything else of that kind. There ain't a man in England as can teach me nothing about short-horns, or land, or grain, or roots; and as I'm a farmer, and proud of it, I don't know what call I have to mix myself up with your politics.'

And yet those who were intimate with Farmer Powell knew that he was a much better read man than many of far higher social position, that he could quote Addison, and 'Captain Steele,' as he called him, and Dickens 'by the yard,' and that he was known to repeat whole chapters of Macaulay—his favourite author—if called upon.

Now it so happened that upon Christmas Day, the only Marine officer on duty was Lieutenant Coppin. As was usual, a parade was ordered of all ranks, previous to the dismissal of those who had obtained leave of absence. With the majority of officers this Christmas Day parade was a matter of but a few minutes; but Coppin, 'drest in a little brief authority,' converted it into a regular inspection. He noted a buckle loose here, a waistbelt a button too high there, he discovered dirt in rifle breeches, the men were badly sized, or the rear rank did not step back smartly enough at the word 'Fours!' So he re-sized them, he put them through the manual, then through the firing exercise, and would probably have made them march past in slow, quick, and double time, had there been room enough on the deck of the Cockahoop. The men went through the unnecessary ordeal as British soldiers always do, steadily and silently.

Coppin could find no fault. So he made them 'Stand easy.' As they 'stood easy,' and the Lieutenant swaggering up and down in front of the line, meditating what further chance he could give them of provoking his displeasure, a distinct voice sang out, 'Cocky Coppin!'

He stopped short, half-delighted at the opportunity now afforded him for venting his ill-temper, and half-mad at the nature of the offence.

'Attention!' he roared out. The men sprang to attention. 'Who said that?' he continued. There was no reply. 'I insist upon finding out who said that.' Still no reply. 'Then I know who it was—Sergeant Cox, take two file and march Private Staples to the cells.' Tom Staples, bringing his rifle to the shoulder, would have spoken, but the angry Lieutenant waved his hand and said, 'Not a word! I've long wanted to have an opportunity of making an example of you; so you'll just pass the next twelve hours in the cells, and I'll have you tried next week for insolence and insubordination.'

So poor Tom Staples was marched off to the cells, and the Lieutenant, having gratified his wish, dismissed the company.

As Tom sat in durance vile, for the first time during his military career, he felt the spirit of mutiny rise within him. 'Get out of this I will,' he thought; 'but how? If I could find another officer I'd tell him all about it; but then he'd only say that he was very sorry, that he was not on duty, and that it would not be for him to interfere with the act of a brother officer. How can I do it?'

He sat ruminating for some time between the two guns of the lower deck which, on board

H.M.S. Cockahoop, formed the 'cells,' when, as the sentry's back was turned, he saw a figure crawling behind one of the gun-carriages; then he heard a voice say,

'Tom, old man, get this side next time sentry turns his back.'

He then saw Will Thompson, a young Londoner, who had but recently enlisted, but who had taken a violent fancy to Tom, and who was to a great extent his *protégé*.

'Tom, old man, it was my parrot who sung out "Cocky Coppin." I know you want to be off to Ridgway Farm to-night. I don't care a bit where I spend my Christmas, and I'm the proper man to be in the cells. So you slip away to where I am, and I'll take your place.'

At first Tom would not hear of the scheme; but Will Thompson was so persistent that he finally assented, and in a few minutes Tom was a free man and Will Thompson was prisoner. It was not 'Dover Jim' the sentry's business to know who his prisoner was. All he had to do was to march up and down for a given space of time, and as the lower deck was very dark, he could hardly tell whether it was Tom Staples he was guarding or the Port Admiral himself.

At five o'clock, when the officers' Christmas dinner was in full swing, Tom put off for shore with a boat full of liberty men.

'Hullo! Tom, old man, how did you get out?' was the general question.

'Never you mind, mates,' he answered. 'Cocky Coppin's all very well, but he ain't going to do me out of my Christmas run ashore. It was Will Thompson's parrot that sung out "Cocky Coppin" on parade, and Will Thompson's serving my time out,

and no one'll be any the wiser, for you may take your Alfred Davy that "Cocky" will be too full to twig the exchange.'

There was a general roar of laughter at this, and the men, putting their backs into the work, soon brought the boat up to the Hoe.

It was a wild night, and the drifts of snow blew straight into Tom's face as he plodded sturdily on to Ridgway Farm. There would be a warm welcome, he knew, at his journey's end, and he was to have an evening's happiness with his sweetheart; so he plunged his hands into his great-coat pockets, and forgot all about the Lieutenant and Will Thompson and the bad weather.

And of course Dorance was the first to meet him as he ploughed his way up to the farmhouse-door. Dorance, smiling and dressed in her Sunday garments, with the burly old farmer behind her.

'Why, Tom,' Dorance said, 'we thought you never were coming.'

'Nor did I, lass,' said Tom, 'and nor did Lieutenant Coppin.'

'And I say, 'darn that Lieutenant Coppin!' broke in the deep voice of the farmer. 'He was a-messin' about here yesterday.'

'Lieutenant Coppin was about here yesterday?' repeated Tom.

'Yes, that he were,' replied the farmer; 'but just you come in, and get some of that snow off, and I'll tell you all about it.'

So Tom entered straight into the family circle around the log-fire assembled, every member of which circle knew Tom well, and greeted him cheerily, the men with sturdy grips of the hand, and the women with hearty salutes on the cheek; for every woman knew that Tom was engaged to Dorance Powell, and Dorance was far too sensible a girl to take offence because he

kissed half a dozen women in her presence. And as Tom was tidying himself up a bit in the farmer's bedroom, the old man continued,

'Yes, Tom, the Lieutenant's been a-messing about here. So he has for some time past, but I didn't like to tell you.'

'Not after—' asked Tom, surprised.

'Yes,' answered the farmer, 'after Dorance. He spoke to her once or twice, and I think she boxed his ears the last time; any-ways, when he come here yesterday, I says to him, says I, "Look here, sir, you may be an officer and a gentleman, and I don't say you ain't, but I do say that my Dorance ain't for the like of you. She's give away already." And out he goes, with as bad a look on him as I ever saw on any man.'

'Then that's why he's had such a down on me lately,' said Tom. 'He's always been a-finding fault with me, and to-day he stopped my leave, only I—I got away—'

'Got away?' said the farmer in alarm; 'you don't mean to say you've been and deserted?'

'Not exactly,' answered Tom; 'but I got away, so don't you ask any questions.'

To describe the Christmas dinner which followed would be to tread in well-worn footsteps. Suffice it, therefore, to say that Farmer Powell in no way belied the proverbial reputation of Devonshire farmers for hospitality; that Tom Staples was supremely happy seated next Dorance, and that it was as much as he could do to do justice to the varied and ample fare set before him, and at the same time to answer the questions and parry the good-humoured witticisms which were showered upon him; and that the farmer himself, seated in an old arm-



chair which an ancestor had brought from Spain in the old buccaneering days, looked the picture of a stalwart English host. In the intervals of talk and laughter, the storm could be heard battering against the doors and windows; but the farmer pushed the cider-bowl round, and swore that Tom should have an escort of thirty men back to the Hoe if he wanted it. And when the ladies withdrew, the farmer, Tom, and the two or three other male guests drew their chairs nearer to the fire, lit their pipes, and fell a-thinking. It is surprising how much men think after a hearty dinner, and how repulsive for the first few minutes is any sound that breaks the silence of meditation; and so the farmer, and Tom, and the others sat with their feet on the fender, puffing away vigorously, now and then applying themselves to the cider, but each man thinking as profoundly, and looking as stern, as if the weight of an empire was on his shoulders. Farmer Powell broke the silence.

'Well, Tom, lad,' he said, 'you're a-goin' to give up sodgering, and you're a-goin' to settle down, like I'

'Hope so, farmer,' replied Tom. 'I've had a good spell of duty, and I think I may say I've earned a rest.'

'Why, darn it all, man,' said the farmer, 'of coorse yew have. Them two bits of metal on your coat don't go for nothing. And what I says is, gentlemen, this to the other thinkers and smokers, 'that if any man in this world deserves a good rest and a good wife—'

'They doan't always go together,' chimed in one of the thinkers.

'Now don't you be a-groaning, Coombe,' said the farmer; 'cos you ain't got 'xactly either, it don't follow that Tom shouldn't—'

'More it don't,' chimed all the thinkers at once.

'So let's give him a bumper, lads,' said the farmer; and the great bowl of cider passed from brawny hand to brawny hand, and each man, ere he dipped his face into it, said, 'Good luck to yew, Tom, and to Mistress Dorance.'

'And I'll tell yew what I've done, Tom,' said the farmer, when the bowl was restored to its position in the centre of the table—empty, 'I've put by a little bit of money in my time, although times have been, of late, darned bad, and I've bought up the lease of the Red Bull, down there by Log Lane, and I'm a-having it repainted and refitted, and I'm a-going to have the name changed to the Royal Marine, and I'm a-going to make a present of it to yew and Dorance.'

Even Lieutenant Coppin's heart would have warmed to have heard the cheer which greeted this announcement. As it was, the ladies came tumbling in from the next room to learn the reason, and complaining, not unreasonably, at being shut out from all the fun; and when the noise had subsided, Tom got up. He tried in vain to speak for a minute or two.

'Farmer Powell,' he began, 'I think I ought to say father—'

At this moment there came a thundering rap at the door, quickly followed by a second and a third. The old farmer jumped up with a remark about 'darned impertinence;' but stout and fearless as he was, it was with no little dismay that, as he opened the door, he found himself confronted by an officer in her Majesty's uniform, closely backed up by a file of men.

Lieutenant Coppin tried to stride into the room, but the farmer checked him. 'Gently, Lieute-



nant, gently, sir; this is a private house, please to remember.'

Dorance, crying, threw herself into the arms of Tom Staples; the other ladies, having no one into whose arms they could throw themselves, fainted in different chairs.

'I want your guest, farmer,' said Coppin, with ill-disguised satisfaction, 'he is my prisoner, for having broken out of cells. Two files, three paces forward—march!' And before Tom could take leave of the farmer, or whisper a word of comfort into the ear of Dorance, he found himself a prisoner between four men.

The farmer ground out a big oath or two, and Dorance shrieked. But the word was given, 'Quick march, forward!' and Tom Staples was marched out into the bitter night.

At the jetty one of the ship's boats was waiting. The coxswain, saluting, told the Lieutenant that the wind was rising, and that the sea was very high.

'I don't care a damn,' said Coppin, 'for sea or wind; I'm in command here, and if you don't shove off I'll have the whole boat's crew arrested for disobedience to orders.'

There was an audible murmur amongst the men, but they took their seats. Tom was placed in the stern next to the Lieutenant, and the boat put off.

So long as they were under lee of the sea-wall all was well; the waves were high, the wind blew strongly, and the lights of the Cockahoop could but faintly be made out through the snow; but directly they got outside, and met the full force of wind and water, the position of the boat became perilous. The men pulled their hardest, but it was as much as they could do to make way; every sea that caught the boat

made it shudder, and drenched the occupants; but the Lieutenant was primed with his Christmas dinner and its subsequent potations, and urged the men on with oath and threat. At length matters grew so serious, the boat made so little way, that the coxswain declared, on his own responsibility, that he would put back. The Lieutenant rose, and drawing a pistol from his belt, swore that the boat should proceed. Suddenly a sea pooped the small craft, there was a moment's confusion as the men endeavoured to keep their oars in their hands, the boat gave a lurch forward, there was a wild cry, and when the boat righted the Lieutenant was not to be seen.

'And a darned good job too!' said more than one of the blue-jackets. But Tom Staples, encumbered as he was with his great-coat, plunged overboard. Then all was darkness and silence for a moment, save for the howling of the wind.

'Back water, lads, as hard as you can!' the men heard. The men obeyed, and were gratified by Tom singing out,

'All right! I've got him. Back a little more!'

In ten minutes, Tom and the Lieutenant were hauled on board with great difficulty. It had been a near thing with Coppin, for he lay in the stern-sheets quite motionless; but Tom chafed him, and gave him some brandy, and after half an hour's hard pulling they arrived alongside the Cockahoop. Officers and crew received them with a cheer. When the tale was told how Coppin had been washed overboard, and how Staples had saved his life, the cheers were renewed, and both the captain of the Cockahoop and the senior officer of Marines shook Staples by the hand.

Discipline, however, is merciless, and Tom Staples was replaced in the 'cells' for the night. Said Will Thompson to him as he passed,

"Tom, old man, you missed seeing Coppin at his best. When he came here he was pretty full, and he raved like a madman. "Man the pinnace," says he; "I don't care if the men are at their Christmas dinner or not: That man Staples has broken cells, and I'll have him to-night." And as he was officer of the day, they had to obey him."

On the next morning, Tom Staples was brought up before the court assembled in the captain's cabin, on the charge of having broken prison when confined there by order of his superior officer. Lieutenant Coppin was still too unwell to appear; but the *pro forma* prosecution was undertaken by the captain of Marines. It was sufficiently proved by witnesses that the cry 'Cocky Coppin' had been raised, and it was conclusively agreed that Private Staples, after having been placed in the cells, escaped. But, on the other side, the weight of evidence was enormous. Half a dozen witnesses—officers and men—showed that Lieutenant Coppin was an unreasonable disciplinarian; Will Thompson stated that his parrot was the offender; and further witnesses deposed that for some little time past there had been an ill-feeling between Coppin and Staples. The president summed up. It clearly appeared, he said, that Lieutenant Coppin had grossly exceeded his duty in accusing a man at random of the offence named in the indictment. Taking into consideration all the facts, he should not only discharge Thomas Staples without the slightest stain upon his character, but

he would take the earliest opportunity of recommending him to the notice of the Port Admiral for his gallant conduct on the previous night.

It was of no use trying to keep the verdict a secret; it got out somehow, and cheer upon cheer rang out into the winter sky from the throats of the men assembled on deck. Tom Staples had but a few more days' service to run, and during that time he was the hero of the port.

On the fateful day—the last of his service under the Union Jack and the first of his service to a wife—Lieutenant Coppin came up to him. 'Staples,' he said, with a gracious manner hitherto quite foreign to him, 'I know you're going to marry Dorance Powell to-day. Well, I loved her; but I'm not sorry that you are the man of her choice; for I am sure she could not find a better or a truer man for a husband. When you saved my life—I did not know of it until I recovered—you made me a different man. I'm a better man; will you allow me to be a best man?'

And best man Lieutenant Coppin was at the wedding in Plymouth old church; and Dorance wore on the occasion a magnificent necklace of diamonds, turquoises, and rubies—the colours of the glorious old national flag—which the officers and men of H.M.S. Cockahoop gave her; and Tom Staples, for the first time in his life, found himself in possession of a gold watch and chain, 'Presented'—so said the inscription within—'by his friend Thomas Coppin, Lieutenant R.M.L.I.' And whenever the story of this Christmas Day was told again, as it often was, Thomas Staples expressly put in at the end that it was told by a Marine.

FRANK ADELL.

## WELBECK WONDERS AND WOODLANDS.

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THERE is, I take it, no county in England which contains so many stately homes in so confined a compass as does Nottingham. Take up a map of that fair shire, and notice the number of ancestral houses grouped amid wooded undulations and spaces of park. There are the 'Dukeries' amid the sylvan seclusion of Sherwood's ancient forest, right in the heart of Robin Hood's country, and embracing the estates of the Duke of Newcastle at Clumber, the Duke of Portland at Welbeck, and that of Earl Manvers at Thoresby, the extinct dukedom of Kingston; while adjoining are broad acres of swelling hill, devious valley, and belted woodland, belonging to the Dukes of Norfolk, Rutland, and St. Albans. But the 'Dukeries' only head the list of these hereditary houses. Near by is Newstead Abbey, where Lord Byron lived, and Annesley Hall, where he loved and lost Mary Chaworth; while, taking Nottinghamshire houses in alphabetical order, I run from memory quite rapidly off the reel such retreats as Babworth, Bestwood, Bramcote, Bunny, Chilwell, Clifton (do you remember Kirke White's *Clifton Grove*?), Colston Bassett, Flintham, Grove, Kelham, Kingston, Kirklington, Norwood, Nuttall Temple, Osberton, Oxtou, Papplewick, Rampton, Rufford, Serlby, Sherwood Lodge, Stapleford, Stoke, Stuffynwood, Thump-ton, Thurgarton, Watnall, Wollaton, Worksop Manor, and others.

Engaging as the majority of these places are, not only by reason of their architecture and

associations, but by virtue of their scenic surroundings amid old oak forests in which Saxon hid and Norman hunted, none of them is so interesting, so curious, so attractive, so astonishing, so eccentric as Welbeck. By its vast size and its startling surprises it is calculated very considerably to enlarge what phrenologists call 'the bump of wonder,' to the imminent danger of upsetting the balance of the cerebral symmetry. You approach Welbeck, let us assume, from Worksop. The sun lies warm and bright on the grassy meads and wooded uplands of the Sherwood country. Suddenly, and without seeming warning, your horse leaves the glad light. You plunge into a resounding dim vault. You might have been precipitated into the Catacombs. You might have been thrown into the cave of Trophobius. Instead of the summer scent, there is the smell of the tomb. Instead of the pleasant silence of a country lane, there is the confusion of clamorous echoes: something like that you hear when an express train is bursting through a tunnel. Ever and anon a reminiscence of gas or a circle of light, apparently struggling through a bulls-eye lantern from the rumbling roof, makes weird Rembrandt-like shadows. If your horse is spirited, and not accustomed to the strange plunge the coachman has taken, driving him is a nervous sensation, and he will probably emerge in the sunshine at the new riding-school at Welbeck trembling with the excitement of fear, and with foam flecking his

bit. This subterranean carriage-way is but one of the many interminable tunnels with which the late Duke of Portland perforated Welbeck and its approaches. He is reported to have spent between two and three millions sterling in making this vast congeries of underground walks and drives and halls. There is a labyrinth of private tunnels through which three people can walk abreast. They are comfortably warmed, and lighted artificially by gas, and naturally by circles of plate-glass from the grassy avenues of the park above. Altogether there are some miles of these underground promenades. The kitchens, too, are subterranean, and the dishes are conveyed to the guests in the abbey above by a miniature railway and a hydraulic lift. The library, a magnificent building, as well as the noble picture-gallery, crowded with works of art, together with reading-rooms, are also under the earth. The picture-gallery I have denominated noble, and noble it is, being two hundred and thirty-six feet long, and illuminated by eleven hundred burners. This gives access to a further subterranean hall of splendid proportions and delightful appointments. It is meant for a ballroom. Like all the other chambers, it is excavated out of the solid clay at a fabulous expense of time and capital, the one of years, the other of thousands of pounds. Internally, these cavernous buildings are perfectly cheerful and most lavishly decorated. The guide-book epithet 'palatial' conveys but a remote impression of their grandeur. Externally, all you see is a lawn diversified with shrubs, broken here and there by a disk of glass, sending natural light below, and small iron structures that are the ventilators for the gas. The lodges in the park

are treated also to the late Duke's mole-like mania, most of the kitchens and other offices being underground, at the side of the lodge, lighted by bulls-eyes.

The decease of the eccentric author of these extravagances cut short further designs suggestive of the ancient cave period. At the date of his death (December 1879) the beautiful pleasance around Welbeck Abbey was in the possession of an army of artificers and navvies carrying out the capricious nobleman's designs. Shedding and workshops, forge fires and machinery in motion, had converted a fairy scene into a huge contractor's yard. By the Duke's death one or two thousand men, who had worked here for years, were thrown out of employment. It was not likely that the young Duke, if he would preserve his reputation for sanity, would prolong the puerile *penchant* of his predecessor.

Who, you ask, could be this Magnificent Mole, this Mighty Maker of a Regal Rabbit Warren? His Grace William John Cavendish Scott-Bentinck, fifth Duke of Portland, was certainly no ordinary nobleman. History might be searched in vain for another such patrician. He stands alone in the solitude of his own odd isolated originality. His character was a study. Why did he build underground? It was not for want of space above. The Bentincks own 153,163 English acres, besides London estates. He built magnificent stables and superb riding-schools, but he never strode a horse. He built a ballroom which is almost without a rival, but he never danced. He erected skating-rinks, but he never skated. He found employment for vast numbers, yet he could not have been respected, for the workmen felt that their labour was being

thrown away. He was called the 'Invisible Prince' because of the air of mystery with which he clothed himself. A member of the four leading London clubs, he never entered their portals. His shooting and hunting parties were unsurpassed, but he never saw his invited guests. He cultivated flowers and fruit, whose fragrance and flavour never ministered to his enjoyment. He bred trout by the forty thousand a year, yet he was not an angler. A great farmer, agriculture attracted him not. 'Can't you let it alone?' was Lord Palmerston's advice to a perfervid politician. 'Can't you leave me alone?' was the lifelong aspiration of the Hermit of Welbeck the Wonderful. He lived to his eightieth year. There is an expressive marble bust of him in the underground picture-gallery. It is a kindly, shrewd, noble, and intelligent face. In the head a Lavater would see 'constructiveness' writ large. The recluse loved to be hidden from the sight of men: he is now out of human gaze for ever. Inquisitive sight-seers may regard with wondering eyes the monuments of his unaccountable taste; but the builder himself they never beheld. It was his delight to be underground: he is now beneath the mould for ever. 'Eccentricity' was the good-natured description assigned to the strange anfractuosités of the departed Duke's nature. He wanted to escape from the eye of the world, and by his efforts to elude notice he was always being brought into prominence. If he had been great in statesmanship, like the illustrious founders of his house, he would probably have attracted less attention than he did by his studied retirement. What is really great is less sought after than what is merely curious. It has been pointed out that a trivial

paradox, an unsettled point, however trumpery—the sex of the Chevalier d'Eon or the authorship of the Letters of Junius—often engage men more than an important but unperplexing truth. A youthful kinsman has inherited the immense wealth and great influence of the late dukedom. The Bentincks of the past bequeathed grand traditions to their heirs. One Bentinck was so notable a figure in our national life that he is one of Macaulay's most lauded heroes. Another Bentinck is the subject of that charming piece of biographical work, the *Life of Lord George Bentinck*, by Benjamin Earl of Beaconsfield. It was in Welbeck Park that Lord George died so suddenly in 1848. He was walking from Welbeck to visit Earl Manvers at Thoresby. Two men saw him leaning against a gate. They thought he was reading, 'as he held his head down.' They went their way. Some hours afterwards he was found, says Lord Beaconsfield, 'lying on his face; his arms were under his body, and in one hand he grasped his walking-stick. His hat was a yard or two before him, having evidently been thrown off in falling. The body was cold and stiff.' Medical opinion ascribed the mysterious death to 'a spasm of the heart.' The people of Mansfield believe to this day that Lord George Bentinck was one of the victims of Palmer, the Rugeley poisoner, with whom he had had betting transactions, in which Palmer had lost heavily. It is even said that the two men were seen together on the day before the sudden death in Welbeck Park. Palmer's career was not exposed until long after Lord George's death, so that no suspicion was attached to that notorious criminal at the time. It is well known that the late Duke of Portland never waged a

five-pound note; and a local legend has it that after his brother met his strange death he found among his papers a promissory note for 30,000*l.* This he restored to the debtor, after extorting from him a promise that he would have no more turf transactions.

The Bentinck family has always been a lover of horses, and the late Duke, though not a sportsman, kept up the equine repute of his house. The old riding-school of the Duke of Newcastle's time he converted into a museum and picture-gallery. The floor, of polished oak, reflects every angle of light; the roof is made to represent an Italian sky; walls and doors are of looking-glass. Four cut glass chandeliers, each weighing a ton, are suspended from the roof; sixty-four side-brackets of glass, in addition, make a total of two thousand lights. The room is a temple of crystal. A tunnel, a mile or more in length, full of strange perspectives, takes us to the new riding-school—another of Welbeck's wonders. It is an astonishing building, 380 feet long, 112 feet broad, and 50 feet high. It is lit by eight thousand gas-jets. The richly ornamented roof is of glass and iron. The tiles are of copper, the walls solid masonry. Fifty columns support the roof. There is a cornice in solid stone, which cost five guineas a yard to carve. A notable frieze of metal-work represents foliage, fruit, flowers, birds, and beasts of the forest, coloured and carved in a most artistic manner. The floor is covered with soft tan. Besides this new riding-school is the 'Gallop.' All under glass, and laid with tan, it is more than a thousand feet long. It takes the eye some time to properly appreciate the full proportions of this costly hippodrome. Radiating from here

are the stables, outbuildings, coach-houses, cow-houses, kennels, conservatories, hothouses, shrubberies, gardens, peach-walls, fruit avenues, servants' houses. All these, being a mile or more from the Abbey, make this portion of the estate look like a small town.

Welbeck Abbey—that is, the old historic house—although a vast pile, white and castellated, and pierced with innumerable windows, is not an edifice of remarkable beauty. The ancient Abbey, after an existence of four hundred years, was demolished at the time 'bluff Harry turn'd the cowls adrift;' and so few of its original features are left that the fabric has become like Sir John Cutler's silk stockings, which had been darned so often that none of the first material was retained. The Cavendishes converted it into almost its present shape. King James visited Sir William Cavendish here in 1619. In 1663 Charles I. was entertained here by the Earl of Newcastle, from whom the Abbey subsequently passed to the Bentincks, the founder of whom, plain Hans Bentinck, came over with William Prince of Orange, and rendered the Dutchman yeoman service. The principal apartment at the old Abbey is the Gothic hall, a gem of architecture. The ceiling is a revelation in its pendant fan-tracery. There are some good paintings in the drawing and dining rooms, mostly by Rembrandt, Snyders, Vandyck, and Sir Joshua; but the finest pictures, to my thinking, are the landscapes that the many case-ments of the old house frame—'bits' of Sherwood Forest, 'studies' of immemorial oaks that threw their leaf-shadows on the bracken in the dim centuries before the monks illuminated their missals at the Abbey; 'composi-



tions' with a winding lake in the foreground, and fir and pine in the background stretching to the sky-line.

Let us leave Welbeck and its buildings, and wander at will about its green glades. Tennyson's 'Talking Oak' is a modern shoot compared with some of the historic trees of the 'Dukeries.' The age of the 'Greendale Oak' at Welbeck—the Methuselah of his race—has been estimated at fifteen hundred years. It is still alive, standing knee-deep in fern, comfortably supported, as the patriarch should be, with crutches under his arms. A hundred and fifty years have passed since a critical surgical operation was practised on him by a former owner, who made an aperture through the trunk. Through this opening a Duke of Portland drove a carriage and six horses, and it is said that three horsemen could have ridden abreast through the arch. A cabinet, made from the wood taken from the heart of the still living tree for the Countess of Oxford, is one of the sights of the Abbey. 'Robin Hood's Larder' is another of the veterans who has lost his heart, but in the veins of whose great, sinewy, gnarled limbs the life-sap still flows freely. This tree, sometimes called 'The Shambles Oak,' and sometimes 'Butchers' Shambles,' had its inside burnt wantonly out by a party of Sheffielders picnicking in these secluded glades in the summer of 1878. The idyllic scenery could not have had much influence over such savage minds. The venerable tree is now held together by chains, a charred remnant of its former glory. A thousand years ago it flourished in leafy loveliness, only to suffer the outrages of modern barbarism. This oak the Druids may have worshipped. It may

have been conscious of Alfred's institutions. Mab and her elves had danced beneath its boughs, under the fixed stars, to the music of the wind. Robin Hood, with Little John, Much, the miller's son, Tuck, the merry friar, and Maid Marian had sported upon its sward in the forest freedom. The rival Roses warred here. Gay Cavalier and surly Puritan had passed under it. Winter winds had been kind to its topmost branches, as summer sun had made its leaves lambent with living light. It was left to the Vandals of the Victorian era to show their 'warm' regard for such ancient majesty in a 'consuming' affection of fire. After this we need not go out of our way to sneer at Rufus B. Crooks and Colonel S. P. B. Scott fastening their tourist names in brass plates on the gigantic girths of the giant trees of the Yosemite Valley.

Close by there be other patriarchal oaks bearing specific names. After passing the 'Central Oak' comes the 'Major Oak,' in whose hollow trunk a dozen people may dine, and round whose knotted trunk twenty people may join hands. Though the inside of the tree has gone, its branches retain their pristine freshness. The 'Parliament Oak' is another veteran of Sherwood Forest, so called because Edward I. held a Parliament under the amplitude of its shadow six hundred years ago. The whole of this country of the 'Dukeries' is picturesque. A paradise for painters, it is little known. The Sherwood Forest which erst stretched unbroken for many miles, and as late as last century spread without a clearing from Mansfield to Nottingham, is no longer a continuous forest. The woods lie in great dark shadowy patches amid pleasant meads and cultivated uplands. But much



of the real forest remains; and the lover of the best sylvan scenery in these isles cannot do better than make his way to Mansfield, twelve miles from Nottingham, and thence to Edwinstowe, and strike across to the Birklands and Bilhagh. There are woodland wanderings in these old-world glades of ancient oaks and silvery birches that will make him wish he were an Orlando to linger in such an Arden, even if he did not find his Rosalind. Here and there, where there is a private carriage-road, it is of green, and the trees seem by mutual consent just to have stood back a little to allow the wheels to pass. But

there are sinuous bridle-paths and footways that give new surprises in scenery. Both the Birklands and Bilhagh are veritable relics of ancient Sherwood. The space between the gnarled old oaks has been filled up with delicate birch-trees. The contrast between the 'lady of the woods' and the scathed, gray, sturdy, tottering old oaks is poetically suggestive. It is the contrast between the bent, tottering, seamed, and furrowed old man, and the winsome maiden, soft and tender, smiling with fairness and beauty. It is the contrast between May and December, Age and Youth, Life and Death, Hope and Despair.

EDWARD BRADBURY.

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## THE STORY OF AN UNDERGRADUATE'S RING.

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My large gold signet-ring was nowhere to be found ! It was given to me by my father on the night before I left the paternal roof, to commence life as a freshman at All Saints' College, Cambridge.

'My dear George,' said he that evening, over our wine, 'you are now going to begin life as a man.'

I assumed an air of great seriousness and responsibility, and readily acquiesced. My father went on in the most orthodox and parental way,

'You will meet various temptations, as perhaps you know, in your struggle through the world ; but I don't think you are like the general run of young fellows, and your mother and myself have decided to do a thing which we would not be warranted in doing, unless we had perfect confidence in you.'

Here he paused for a few moments and sipped his wine.

'This,' I thought, 'means that the dear old governor is going to double my allowance.' So I assured him of my intentions of rendering myself fully worthy of any unlimited amount of confidence that he might care to bestow on me.

'Yea, my dear boy,' continued my father, putting down his glass, 'I believe you will do your best, and in the mean time I will place in your hands the old signet-ring of our family. Here it is—be careful of it, and it may, perhaps, remind you that on you depends, not only your own success in life, but the reputation of an ancient family.'

I was rather crestfallen, I must

confess. From the flourish of the paternal trumpet, I had expected nothing less than a double allowance. However, I concealed all traces of disappointment, and thanked my father very energetically, promising never to let it depart from my keeping. And now, after only a month's possession, the ring has disappeared.

I first became aware of the fact in hall, whilst engaged in dissecting the leg of what must have been, in his day, a most athletic turkey. I happened to glance at the little finger of my right hand, and to my horror no ring was there. I don't know why I had not noticed its absence before. I had rushed late into hall from the Union, and so, perhaps, that might account for it. As it was, I let my knife and fork fall into the plate, and stared stupidly at my finger. I felt in my pockets and brought out a huge handful of silver, which, in my nervousness, I dropped, to the great discomfort of the waiter, who had to go on his hands and knees under the table to pick it up. But the ring was nowhere to be found. I fully remembered having it with me when I left my rooms ; in fact, I noticed it on my hand when I 'sporting my oak,' or, in plainer English, when I shut my outer door. Between then and dinner I had only been to the Union to wash my hands. 'It must be there,' I thought ; and leaving the leg of the aforesaid athletic bird to remain in its pristine unsevered state, I rushed out of the hall.

In the lavatory of the Union it

was nowhere to be seen. 'No one had found a ring of any sort,' the clerk said, but I had better put up a notice. So a notice was accordingly put up, and I retired in a thoroughly dejected and dispirited state of mind. I went to my rooms, and searched in the vague idiotic way common to every one on such occasions. I believe I even looked in the coal-box and under the grate; but, needless to say, with no success. At length, in the hopelessness of despair, I gave up the search, and settled myself with a pipe in front of the fire.

A couple of days passed without any tidings of the ring. I gave it up as lost, and wrote a penitential letter to my father, which I posted, with a heavy heart, on my way to chapel one evening.

As in all college chapels, the seats in All Saints' were ranged longitudinally in three tiers down the building. In the first two rows sat undergraduates of the first and second years, and the top row of 'stalls' was reserved for dons, bachelors, and third-year men. My favourite place was the corner of one of the seats in the second tier, at the end of the building. By turning half round, which, owing to the nature of my seat, was not an improper thing to do, I could obtain a complete view of the Rev. Jonathan Minchin, Dean of the college, whose stall was situated above mine, and just a little to the left. He was a tall lean man, with dull cavernous eyes, and thin brown hair confusedly straggling over half of his head and nearly the whole of his face. The colour of the latter was nearer that of a healthy mummy than anything else, saving the end of his nose, which seemed to have assimilated the colour of a red cotton pocket-

handkerchief which he was continually applying to it. His manner was on the whole, kind and courteous, though excessive nervousness sometimes got the better of his judgment, and obtained for him a certain amount of unpopularity, especially amongst us freshmen, who, in our laudable efforts to catch all the summer that we could out of the flying terms, must have vexed his soul very much indeed.

Whilst standing up in chapel my attention used to be divided between this interesting personage, the various carvings in wood and stone, and, of course, my prayer-book. I used to gaze—when he was not looking—on his study-beaten face, and wonder if ever I should become like that when I was a don. I am not a don yet, by the way, nor is there any likelihood of my ever attaining to the privileges of the high table; but these were dreams of my first freshman's term, when the Tripos was a vague idea, hidden in the distant future, and when every thing else was bright and hopeful.

No; everything was not bright and hopeful that evening when I went into the chapel after posting the letter. I had violated the confidence my father had reposed in me, and I had the prospect before me of a tremendous outburst of wrath on his part for so doing. I was in no humour to attend to the Psalms, or even to my friend Dollman's facetious remarks, which he artfully made during the response verses; but I put my hands in my pockets beneath mysurplice, and commenced my usual investigation of the Dean. My eyes fell upon his white hand, doubled up on the cushion beside his prayer-book; and also, to my intense bewilderment, on a signet-ring adorning his little finger.

It was my ring !

I literally gasped for breath. That it was my ring there could be no mistake. My eyes were only a few inches off from it, and I recognised every familiar mark. There was the curiously chased thick rim and the large blood-stone seal ; and there, carved on it, was the crest of the Sherwood family—a shaggy-maned fabulous animal, a griffin, I think, with a serpent's sting protruding from its mouth, and a castle tower round its neck by way of collar. The more I looked the more impossible I felt it was that I could be mistaken. Suddenly Mr. Minchin caught my gaze fixed on the ring, and hastily drew his hand under the sleeve of his surplice. His other hand fidgeted nervously with the tassel of the cushion ; and, until the end of the Psalms, he kept his eyes steadily on his prayer-book. After the first lesson, when we all rose for the *Magnificat*, I saw that both of his hands were visible, but the ring had disappeared. I puzzled over the matter for the whole of the evening, and took Dollman into my confidence ; but Dollman chose to be what he considered funny, and gave me no advice at all.

'It would be an awful spree,' he remarked, 'to have him up—detectives, handcuffs, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. Next morning we'd have in the papers, "Alleged fraudulent and daring Robbery by a Don," or "Shocking Conduct of a Dean ; barefaced Outrage—"'

'Do be quiet, and don't talk nonsense,' I said testily. 'Can't you see that I'm in a fix ?'

'It would be an awful joke,' he continued ; and I could get nothing else out of him for the rest of the evening.

I passed an unsettled sort of

night. My slumbers were disturbed by nightmares of rings and guilty surpliced deans ; one of the most amusing of which was a vision of the Rev. Jonathan Minchin struggling hard with a castellated collar which seemed to have been changed from the griffin's neck to his.

I rose late, and was just finishing breakfast, when my gyp, a little bald-headed bandy-legged old man, came in. He deposited his old top-hat, with his handkerchief inside, in a corner of the room near the door, and advanced towards the breakfast-table.

'Good-mornin', sir,' said he. 'Very strange thing, sir, but, beggin' yer parding, sir, I think I see a ring yesterday very much like the one you lost, sir ;' and he held his head on one side, just like an old parrot.

'Did you really, Juggins !' I exclaimed. 'Where did you see it ?'

'That's where it's strange, sir,' answered Juggins, pausing, with the coffee-pot in his hand. 'I told you afore, sir, that I waits upon Mr. Minchin ; and—and—sir—'

'And you saw the ring in his rooms ?' I interrupted, with a judicial air.

'Yes, sir ; that is what I was a-goin' to say, sir,' replied Juggins, looking rather relieved ; 'very strange thing, sir. Never see any joolery in Mr. Minchin's rooms afore. Peculiar, ain't it, sir ?' and Juggins went on clearing away the breakfast-things.

Now all of this happened in my first term, when my ideas of the race of dons and their social manners and customs were decidedly vague. I might venture to say without much exaggeration that I knew more about the ordinary South Sea islander than about a college don ; and my own

tutor filled me with greater awe than the king, queen, and all the royal family of the Cannibal Islands could possibly have done. I have since learned that the average don is a man like any one else, and that, far from spending his life in feasting at the high table, or drinking old port in the common-room, he does more work in the course of the day than any six average undergraduates; and, judging from my gyp's account, our Dean's daily labours must have equalled those of the whole undergraduate part of the University put together.

Amongst the other gentlemen on whom my gyp waited, the only don was the Rev. Jonathan Minchin; and, thirsting for ethnological information, I used, very reprehensibly, to encourage him to gossip about the ways and habits of that reverend gentleman. Juggins, being of a loquacious disposition, was never averse to a friendly chat, especially if there was any chance of its leading up to a quart of ale, which, in defiance of our Dean's Blue Ribbon precepts, it not infrequently did. In this way, therefore, it came about that I established confidential relations between myself and my bandy-legged attendant. Hitherto all the confidences had come from him to me, and now I thought there would be no harm in reversing the proceedings; so, in the fulness of my heart, I told him all I knew concerning the disappearance of the ring. This course of action I confess was rather *infra dig.*; but, again, I must bring forward my freshness as an excuse.

'Werry peculiar, sir,' said Juggins, when I had finished. 'Perhaps Mr. Minchin picked it up in the Union.'

'By Jove!' I exclaimed suddenly, jumping up and pacing the

room in a frantic manner. 'How foolish! how on earth could I have forgotten? I see it all now; of course I see it!'

'Have you found it now, sir?' asked Juggins, evidently astonished at my vehemence.

'No!' I replied; 'but I remember now. How stupid not to have thought of it before—that whilst I was brushing my hair, Mr. Minchin came into the room and rinsed his hands in the very next basin to the one which I had been using. He only remained a moment or two, so that I forgot all about it until now.'

'That don't look much like findin', do it, sir!' said Juggins, in an alarmed manner; 'more like—'

'Stop, Juggins,' I returned, 'we must not be too rash; and, mind you, for goodness' sake, don't say a syllable to any one.'

'So Juggins promised, and I fully believe he's kept his word.

A morning or two afterwards I was smoking my after-breakfast pipe, and reading over again a letter from my father; he seemed to be in a state of furious wrath, and prophesied for me a future compared with which the career of Hogarth's idle apprentice would simply be noble and honourable in the highest degree. I had proved myself utterly unworthy of trust, and he ought to have known me better than to put the ring into my hands. He expected shortly to hear, &c. My father is a dear old governor, but he has a temper of his own which sometimes, especially when it is directed towards myself, makes me quite sorry for him. I was glancing over this epistle in front of the fire, meditating a reply, when my door opened, and Juggins made his appearance with a scrap of paper in his hand. He did not put his hat down, as was his un-

varied wont, but stood in a nervous way turning it round and round. There was evidently something out of the common in question.

'Anything the matter?' I asked.

'Mornin', sir,' replied Juggins, in a hesitating manner; 'mornin', sir. I think I have done something I didn't ought to, sir; but I found this 'ere paper, sir,' and he handed me what seemed the remaining end of a burnt letter.

I took it lazily from him; but no sooner had my eye fallen on the writing than my attention was painfully concentrated on it. It ran as follows:

'... need you make such a fuss about the ring? Why not have the old seal taken out and a new one put in? No one would be a bit the wiser.—Yours,

'AMELIA GI...'

Juggins had found it, when he was making the Dean's fire that morning, lying on the trivet. He would scorn—so he said—prying into a gentleman's letters; but his eye caught the words 'ring' and 'seal' on this scrap of paper, and so he had brought it to me. He implored me not to say anything about it, as he would lose his place if found out, and he had a wife and family to support.

I felt inclined to say that the less Mrs. J. was supported the better; for she was my bed-maker, and a more unintelligent creature I am sure never harassed the soul of man. A human being who could put methylated spirits into my lamp instead of kerosine oil, and then be cross when I gently expostulated with her, does not deserve support. I did not tell him this, but assured him magnificently that he should not suffer, and consoled him with a quart of beer.

I wrote to my father, informing him of the proof that I had against the Dean. It was a clear case. I leave my ring for a moment on the ledge above the row of basins in the lavatory of the Union. The Dean comes in, catches sight of my property, and immediately walks off with it. I see my ring two days afterwards on his finger, and my gyp also sees it on his dressing-table. He is evidently nervous, and takes some person of the fair sex into his confidence. She, in a letter, part of which is found advises him to have the seal changed, and no one would know anything about it. In the olden days it was quite evidence enough to hang him. My father's reply was characteristic:

'The idea of Mr. Minchin being a thief,' he wrote, 'is simply preposterous. As to your seeing it on his hand, and as to the mysterious burnt letter—to read which was infamously ungentlemanlike on your part—all I can say is summed up in one word, and that is—*bosh!*'

This was decidedly depressing for me. I could expect no help from home, and I determined to take the matter into my own hands. What was I to do? I could not act upon that idiot Dollman's advice, and go to the Dean, and say, 'Please, sir, you've got my ring; and please, sir, I want it.' Neither did I feel inclined to drag the police into the affair; in fact, such a course would be out of the question. I saw no method of pursuing any definite course of action; so, with a prudence worthy of Scotland Yard, I determined to let the thing drop for the present. Meanwhile I kept as much out of the way of the Dean as possible. I changed my seat in chapel, and took especial care to 'keep' the requisite number of weekly attendances.



The uneventful days passed on, and the term was drawing to its close. The 'little go'—which, as everybody knows, is an ordeal that must be gone through by all undergraduates except a privileged few—was at hand, and I was reading violently in order to pass it. But, mingled with Paley's *Evidences* and Euclid's *Elements*, vague sinister ideas as regards my ring were continually passing through my brain.

One morning these ideas were brought together into a definite form. Juggins was, as usual, clearing away the remains of breakfast, and talkative as ever.

'D'you know, sir,' he remarked casually, 'I see that ring this mornin' agen, sir.'

'Dear me!' I replied from the depths of my armchair. 'Where was it?'

'On Mr. Minchin's dressin'-table, sir.'

'H'm!' I said, and went on with my reading. Juggins disappeared into my bedroom, and left me in possession of a daring plan.

'Juggins,' said I again, when that worthy reappeared, 'could you manage to let me have a look at that ring?—come now;' and I stood up and laid my hand on his shoulder.

Juggins looked positively aghast. I never imagined that his muddled-up features could have assumed so vivid an expression.

'That would cost me my place, sir.'

'Chut!' I replied; 'who is to find it out?—you can put it back again. I'll give you a sovereign if you let me have a look at it.'

Juggins hesitated. He was an honest man; but an English sovereign is a sovereign all the world over, and it exercised its due sway upon his prejudices.

'Very well, sir,' he said at length, 'I'll try; but if I lose my

place I'll come to you, sir;' and he retired gracefully from the scene.

The next morning I was roused from my slumbers by Juggins entering my bedroom.

'I've found it, sir,' he said, in a hoarse whisper. 'The Dean's at morning chapel. I found it—'

'Where?'

'In his breeches-pocket, sir,' he replied tragically.

This was rather comíc, but I restrained all signs of amusement, and gravely examined the ring. I was not mistaken; it was the identical ring which my father had given me. I had it now in my own hands, and resolved to make a grand effort.

'Look here, Juggins,' I said calmly, 'I've got the ring now, and am not disposed to let it go again.'

This frightened my gyp to such an extent that he could hardly speak. He stammered out something relative to his ruin and his wife and family; but I preserved my stern demeanour, and continued:

'I'm going to keep the ring now, and you can do one of two things: you can either report the matter to the Dean, or you can go back this moment, force a hole through the pocket of the trousers in which you found the ring, earn five pounds, and never know anything at all about the matter.'

Juggins was in an agony of despair. He implored me to give him back the ring—even engaged himself to claim it from the Dean as my property; he would do anything if I would only give it him back. But I was stern as the villain in a three-volume novel, and had Juggins in my power. With a sorrowful air he pocketed the banknote, and left me to continue my slumbers. But sleep did not visit my eyelids again



that morning. I was delighted at the success of my scheme; and, in the exuberance of my feelings, I at once got up, and, regardless of the untidied and fireless state of my sitting-room, wrote a long flowing letter to my father.

Nevertheless, with all my triumph, certain fears arose within me as to the warrantableness of my proceedings, and I was very much relieved when Juggins informed me, later on in the day, that the Dean had taken the loss very quietly. He merely asked the gyp if he had seen a ring anywhere about the rooms, and, hearing that he had not, simply remarked that he must have dropped it, as he had discovered a hole in his pocket. So nothing more was heard of it that term. I left Cambridge, and convinced my father of Mr. Minchin's nefarious ways. My carelessness in losing it was excused, and I was commended for my vigilance in securing it again; and, in fact, the industrious apprentice himself could not have held a candle to me.

The two succeeding terms passed in their uneventful way. The 'little go' was already a nightmare of the past. The May week, with all its gaiety, had been danced and boated away long ago, and the Long Vacation was offering me all its delights. One of the chief of these was the prospect of a visit to an old friend of my father's—a widower, with a delightful old country house in Devonshire, and the sweetest and prettiest of daughters in charge thereof.

When, in the fulness of time, I arrived there, the house was full of visitors. So full that, on the first evening at least, I found no opportunity whatever of saying any of those pretty tender little speeches which I had prepared

long beforehand, for the benefit of sweet Lucy Underward, my host's only daughter. If I did repeat them, they were wasted on the desert air, as exemplified by the blank minds of two simpering commonplace young ladies, and the unromantic heart of an elderly strong-minded spinster, whose conversation, though learned, was most femininely illogical, but whose looks suggested the complete works of Jevons, Mill, and Aristotle put together. She was one of those ladies who always suggest to me the whole essence of boarding-school, or a complete Child's Guide to Knowledge, with an appendix for adults thrown in. She had exhausted all my stock of ready information, and was taxing my invention to the utmost, when, to my great relief, my worthy host came up. He brought with him a fresh victim to be offered up to Miss McGrinder's encyclopædic thirst, and liberated me. I was departing from my late oppressor, when Mr. Underward caught me by the arm.

'I want to introduce you to Mrs. Gibbons,' he said. 'She is awfully nice, and you must know her.'

'Delighted, I'm sure. Is she that pretty woman sitting on the sofa?'

'Yes,' he returned, as we were crossing the room. 'I want you to know her, as she is soon going to be married to a Mr. Minchin—Dean of your college, I think.'

'What?' I exclaimed, rather recoiling. But there was no getting out of it, and I was duly presented.

She was a handsome woman of about five-and-thirty, with a bright complexion, and gray eyes that insisted on being lively in spite of a certain expression of sadness in them. Her manner

was charming and naïve; and, although my introduction to her was against my will—recalling, as it did, such unpleasant reminiscences—she put me at my ease at once. After a few minutes I was quite enchanted with my new acquaintance, and found myself talking to her as if I had known her for years.

'Are you one of the Sherwoods of Derbyshire?' she asked, *appropos* of my mentioning some incident occurring in that my native county.

'I have the honour to be the eldest son of the present representative of that family,' I replied, smiling.

'How very odd—'

'O Mrs. Gibbons, every one has commissioned me to ask you to play something,' exclaimed Lucy Underward, coming up and breaking in upon our conversation. 'Your playing is so lovely, and we don't often get such a treat down here.'

'I'm very sorry for you,' replied Mrs. Gibbons, rising. 'You must be in a bad way my dear; but I am always happy to make myself useful.'

'And were it not so hackneyed, I should add ornamental, if I can be allowed to say so,' I remarked, as I led her to the piano.

'They don't teach you such pretty speeches up at Cambridge, I'm sure,' she returned, with a bright smile, and settled herself in front of the instrument.

She played, with an exquisite feeling, some of Chopin's charming little *études*, and I turned over the pages almost in a dream. A subdued chorus of 'thank you's,' which might have meant anything, greeted her when she had finished.

'This is a pleasure I never dreamed of,' said I, in a low tone.

She took no notice of my tri-

bute to her powers; but, running her fingers lightly over the keys, turned to me, and said,

'Excuse me, Mr. Sherwood—I hope you won't think it strange—but is that a family ring you have on your finger?'

I was quite taken by surprise. What on earth could she have to do with my ring? However, I remarked that it belonged to my father as head of the family, and I politely handed it to her to look at. She examined it carefully.

'How very remarkable!' she replied, giving it back to me. 'A most strange coincidence. Do you know, I sent a ring, the facsimile of this, last October to Mr. Minchin, of All Saints' College, Cambridge, which he lost in a most mysterious manner.'

My heart gave a big thump. My whole inner man seemed to be about to emulate the scriptural devils, and leap out of my mouth. The whole room was turning round.

'What!' I exclaimed; and then added in a confused stammering fashion, 'You don't mean to say that you sent this ring to—'

'Of course not,' replied Mrs. Gibbons, smiling. 'How could I? But I sent a ring the exact counterpart of this.'

'But how did you get it?' I asked, recovering a little self-control with a great effort.

'I suppose that appears strange to you,' she answered. 'I was just going to tell you, when Miss Underward claimed my services, how odd it was that I should meet you. I think I am a very distant cousin of yours.'

I bowed and smiled in a vague and feeble way, mumbling out my delight at discovering so fair a relative. Mrs. Gibbons continued,

'My mother's maiden name was Sherwood, and she, on her

death, left me a family signet-ring, just like yours.'

I stuck manfully to my galvanised smile, but my brain was whirling round and round. At that moment Miss Underward came up to the piano.

'You are not going to leave off so soon, Mrs. Gibbons?'

'Why *will* you use such awful formality?' replied that lady, turning round. 'Why not call me Amelia?'

Amelia! I could wait no longer. What apologies I made and how I left the room I know not to this day. I got out somehow, and rushed madly up-stairs, almost frightening to death, on the way, a servant with a tray full of crockery. I heard a confused smash of cups and saucers behind me, and fled into my bedroom.

What an utter and complete ass I had been making of myself! I opened my pocket-book and took out a burnt piece of note-paper. There was the signature—'Amelia Gi—'; and down-stairs was the writer thereof, Mrs. Amelia Gibbons. The whole mystery was solved—Mr. Minchin had no more committed a theft than—gracious heavens! But I had been a thief all the time! I had committed a felony in the eyes of the law. The bare idea filled me with horror, and the cold perspiration stood in big drops upon my forehead. What was I to do? Apparently nothing but to rail against my fate. It was all Jugins's fault, I concluded, after the first few cool minutes of reflection; and I made use of very bad language indeed with reference to that estimable personage. Could I explain matters amicably? was my next thought. Could I give Mrs. Gibbons back the ring, and treat the whole affair as an amusing misunder-

standing? If I did so, what would every one think of me? I shuddered at the idea. I am ashamed to confess that I lacked the moral courage to do it. My own ring was lost entirely, beyond a doubt, and no one would be a bit the wiser if I remained in possession of the one at present on my hand.

With this resolution I went down again to the drawing-room. There I explained my hasty flight, by the invention of an important letter which was obliged to go by the last post. I carefully avoided Mrs. Gibbons for the rest of the evening, and, as the French say, went back to my sheep, namely to the two lamblike commonplace young ladies above mentioned. Their innocent prattle on lawn-tennis and dancing demanded no great mental exertion on my part, and the evening passed away with no further incidents. I shall draw a veil over the tortures of that sleepless night. 'A quiet conscience makes one so serene,' says Pope; and having no conscience at all must be quite as good; but a conscience fraught with guilt, and a chance, moreover, of that guilt being found out, is a decidedly unpleasant thing.

I was extremely vain next morning of the air of self-possession I assumed. I explained my general air of seediness by means of a fictitious toothache. I talked to Mrs. Gibbons in an airy way about the connection between our families, and even heard, without flinching a muscle, an announcement from my host, that the Rev. Jonathan Minchin, Dean of All Saints' College, Cambridge, was coming down next day to make a short visit there. I had resigned myself to Fate. Circumstances prevented my taking an abrupt leave of Mr. Underward, and

compelled me to prolong my visit to the bitter end.

Mr. Minchin made his appearance on the morrow, and two or three days passed very pleasantly. Although, in his nervous and bashful way, he monopolised nearly all Mrs. Gibbons's attentions, I did not grudge him his opportunity. For he showed himself to be as pleasant and unassuming a companion as one could wish; and besides, Miss Lucy had a little shining quarter of an hour now and then to spare, which I improved to the best of my advantage. None but a passing reference to the ring had been made, and I came near to erasing the unpleasantness of the subject from my mind altogether. I have little doubt but that I should have succeeded eventually, had not an event occurred which, were it not necessary for the completion of this story, I should lock up in the cupboard in company with the rest of my family of skeletons.

On the fourth morning of Mr. Minchin's visit, Mrs. Gibbons, the Dean, and myself were alone in the breakfast-room, the rest of the household not having yet descended. Mrs. Gibbons was sitting in an armchair near the fireplace, looking shyly up at her affianced, who was standing on the hearthrug reading his letters. I was standing on the other side of the table engaged in the same occupation. I had just come to the end of an affectionate ill-spelt communication from a younger brother, and was putting it in my pocket, when my eye fell upon a small packet which I had not hitherto noticed. It was enclosed in a registered envelope, and bore the Cambridge postmark. I opened it with some curiosity, and discovered a small cardboard box, containing a letter and a vast

quantity of cotton wool. At this moment Mr. Minchin sneezed loudly, causing me to start and drop the box, cotton-wool, and everything on to the floor. I heard something hard roll across the room, and was just going in search thereof, when the Dean stooped down and picked it up. 'Here it is, Sherwood,' said he, handing me something. 'But—but—wait a minute—goodness gracious! How did you get this? This is MY RING!'

'No, it isn't, Jonathan,' exclaimed Mrs. Gibbons. 'I made the same mistake myself. Mr. Sherwood has a ring exactly like yours.'

'But this one came by post, and he has two!' cried Mr. Minchin, noticing the one on my hand.

Mrs. Gibbons looked from him to me in unaffected astonishment. I tried to speak, but my tongue refused to do my bidding. I have had one or two extremely *mauvais quarts d'heures* in my life; but for real, genuine, concentrated essence of misery, recommend me to those few seconds. I stared blankly at the Dean, and the Dean regarded me with equal amazement.

'There is some mystery in this, Mr. Sherwood,' said he, relapsing into his most academical tones. 'Will you have the goodness to elucidate?'

'One is yours and one is mine,' I replied, stammering, and forcing a ghastly attempt at a smile.

'I don't understand you,' said Mr. Minchin. 'Will you kindly step out on to the verandah with me and explain?'

There was no getting out of it now. In the schoolboy phrase, I was 'in for it;' and, with a beating heart, I followed him out of the room.

Never shall I forget his kind-

ness and consideration when he had heard my story. He condemned severely the course my gyp had taken in the matter, but owned, in a pleasant way, that evidences were very strong against himself. He also owned freely that he had been rather bashful about the ring, which Mrs. Gibbons had sent him as a keepsake. So many other dons had got married, and chaffed all round accordingly, that he was very sensitive on the point. We then returned to the breakfast-room, where I found the whole household assembled. I read the letter enclosed in the packet. It ran as follows:

'Dere Sir,—I send you your ring, which my wife found it in one of them old weskits you sed I might have. We have made a grate mistake, and I am very trubbled

about it.—I remane, sir, yours respectfully,  
PETER JUGGINS.'

'Don't be too hard on Juggins, Jonathan dear,' said Mrs. Gibbons after breakfast, when she had heard the story. 'He must be an honest fellow to send back the real ring.'

'Well, for your sake, Amelia, I won't,' said the Dean; and he put his arm round her waist, whereupon I discreetly retired.

My father, when he heard of my fiasco, conjured up the gallows as a likely end for me. He has since changed his opinion; and, at present, I believe I am going to be Lord Chancellor. Which of the two fates will be mine, I cannot say. But of one thing am I certain—and it is that my unfortunate and wretched signet-ring shall never bring me into trouble again.

W. J. LOCKE.

## THREE WIZARDS AND A WITCH.

By MRS. J. H. RIDDELL, AUTHOR OF 'THE SENIOR PARTNER,'  
'GEORGE GEITH OF FEN COURT,' ETC.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

'HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO  
TOOTING?'

It is somewhat humiliating to consider how much sickness, and how little sorrow, affects our personal appearance. A bad bilious attack will pull a man down more than the death of his wife; toothache keeps a sufferer on whom it has fastened its fangs wide awake, though heartache often fails to do so.

All her mental anguish—and there could be no question but that since the previous summer the girl had passed through a season of intense and continuous agony—had failed to work the change in Susan Drummond a few weeks of serious illness sufficed to do.

Mr. Gayre felt unutterably shocked when, ushered into the room where she sat in an easy-chair, propped up with pillows, he saw the havoc so short a time had wrought.

Pale, wan, emaciated—a mere shadow of her former self—her eyes dull and weary, her listless hands thin and nerveless, her whole tired attitude that of one who had just returned worn out from so long a journey into the Dreadful Valley—it seemed almost as though she might better have gone on to the end of her awful pilgrimage, and entered a land from whence no sound returns to earth, no echo even of a sigh.

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Could this really be Sir Geoffrey's Susan, with whom he had ever associated the idea of strong health and almost superabundant vitality?

'Miss Drummond,' he said; and those were the only words he could speak, as he tenderly took her wasted fingers in his own strong clasp, and looked mournfully at the woman he loved.

'Won't you sit down?' she asked feebly, the while she smiled a wan sad smile which smote him to the heart.

'Why did you not send to some of your friends?' he asked. 'It was cruel to leave us in ignorance of where you were, in such uncertainty as to what could have become of you.'

'No one knew where to send,' she answered. 'I wrote as soon as I could.'

'I wanted to write to you,' said Mr. Gayre, 'but having no address—'

'Yes—about what? Oliver?' and for the first time she hesitated a little over his name, and coloured painfully.

'Yes, about Mr. Dane.'

'Is he—free?'

'Not yet; but,' as she turned her head aside with a faint gesture of sorrowful disappointment, 'pray do not look so wretched, Miss Drummond. I have every reason to hope his imprisonment will not continue much longer.'

'You're only saying that to comfort me. Perhaps he is *dead*. I have been ill such a time. Tell



me the worst. O, if he is dead, I wish—I wish I had died too.’

‘He is not dead. Upon my word of honour, as far as I can know anything I have not actually seen, I believe him to be well again, or, at the worst, very much better. A message, I understand, has also in some manner been conveyed to him, so that he knows friends are at work who soon hope to compass his release.’

‘But friends have always been at work, and hitherto no good has resulted, and I don’t think any good is likely to come from their efforts. O, what shall I do! O my darling, what can I do! If only—only you were able to tell me!’ and as she finished this last apostrophe, which was not in the least degree addressed to Mr. Gayre, great tears rolled down her cheeks—tears she was too weak to wipe away.

‘For Heaven’s sake, do not cry!’ entreated Mr. Gayre; ‘I bring you nothing but good news. There may be delay; there always, in such cases, must be delay; for though it seems to be easy enough to get a man into prison, getting him out is a difficult matter. Circumstances, however, have come to my knowledge that make me feel sure ere long Mr. Dane *must* be liberated. I mean to spare no effort in the matter. I have instructed my solicitors, and they are taking all necessary steps. I assure you I feel it cannot be long before Mr. Dane is once again a free man.’

‘And on what ground are you asking for his release now?’ she inquired—‘because he is so ill?’

‘No, because he is innocent,’ answered Mr. Gayre, flushing up to his very temples, yet nevertheless looking straight at Susan.

‘But he was always innocent—I always knew that.’

‘Yes; only the difficulty is,

you see, to get other people to be of this opinion. There was a time when I myself fully believed him guilty. There remains no doubt on my mind now but that he is innocent, yet I see the greatest trouble ahead before we can prove him to be so. My solicitors seem to think, however, that if we are only patient for a short time they will be able to find a way, to persuade the Home Secretary to order a searching inquiry into the whole matter, or grant him a free pardon at once.’

‘A free pardon for what?’ asked Susan, indignation endowing her for a moment with sufficient strength to grasp the arms of her chair and sit up, the while the colour of old dyed her cheeks, and her eyes grew dark with the intensity of her passion—‘for a crime he never committed!’

‘I seem not to be able to speak to-day without distressing you,’ said Mr. Gayre, almost at his wits’ end. ‘The words are a mere form; and what can the form signify in such a case? You want to get Mr. Dane away from Portland: do not quarrel with the means likely to compass that object most speedily.’

‘I will not. I forgot. Liberty for him on *any* terms—*any*,’ and she laid her head wearily back on the pillow; ‘yet I can’t think Oliver would care for freedom as a favour which ought to be given to him as a right. He must know nothing about it till he is out again. Were I a man—and she stopped, and made a sign for Mr. Gayre to give her water.

It was sweet to do even this much for her, but it was dreadful to feel how she shrank from contact with him as he held her up, and see the way her feeble hand shook, and hear the glass tinkle against her teeth, because he who



once would have been denied no privilege of staunch and kindly friendship had passed the borderline and mentioned love.

Putting a strong constraint on himself, as a father might have done, he withdrew his arm, and took the water from her lips, and crossed the warm covering over her panting breast. Then he said, moved by what demon he could never afterwards imagine,

'Were you a man you would feel like a man, and the man does not live who, after a few months—ay, days—of penal servitude, would not take his liberty on *any* terms.'

She did not answer him for a minute. Restlessly she moved her averted head, as though struggling with some great emotion. Before turning her face again towards him, she said, in a feeble voice, with the greatest decision,

'Had Oliver been the poor creature you think him, I should never have promised to be his wife. Though that is all gone and past, you must *never* say anything against him to me. For even in spite of all his faults—and he has faults—I shall think of him as the one perfect man I ever knew. A man could not be perfect who was more than human.'

'It is something,' said Mr. Gayre, 'to know how to avoid your displeasure. I only wish you would tell me how I could win your favour.'

'I am so tired,' she moaned; 'I wish you would go. No, I did not mean to say that; only I feel weary—wearily.'

'I am going,' he answered. 'I will not intrude longer; but before I go tell me what I can do to please you.'

She could not speak the words that trembled on her lips, but she looked at him, with that piteous

look of dumb entreaty we sometimes see in the eyes of an animal utterly at our cruel mercy; then, 'Be just to Oliver,' and hid her face, whilst giving him her hand.

Yes, this was all he could ever expect from Susan Drummond. If his name never passed her lips, it would be 'Oliver,' 'Oliver,' 'Oliver,' in her heart for ever.

Mr. Gayre had some time to wait before a train started for town, and he employed the interval in walking along the Rottingdean Road till he found a point whence he could reach the shore.

The tide was out far as tide at Brighton ever is, and while he stumbled back over the great stones and shingle, he took a savage satisfaction in telling himself the mess he had made of a life that once promised a brilliant future.

'First Love, then Money, then Love again. Accursed be both love and money!' he muttered, regarding that horrible waste of long and unpicturesque sea which is seen to such advantage from the east end of Brighton.

'When she marries me—and she will marry me, because such as she cannot give a promise and take it back—the same loyalty which has kept her true to a man under a heavy cloud will keep her faithful to her husband. I shall have to dread no rival save the never-to-be-forgotten and perfect—And yet, my God,' he added, turning quite unconsciously seaward, as though he felt somewhere—somewhere beyond the low horizon hemming in an expanse of dull gray water—the God in whom he believed, our God who sits above the water-clouds, would hear the cry of one of His creatures, who in no great or grand fashion had drifted so hopelessly wrong—'I would rather try conclusions with *any* rival than

contempt—any man than repugnance.

'What have I done,' he thought, walking slowly along the beach, with head bowed and hands clasped idly behind his back, 'that twice I should have loved women who had no look or smile for me! I—' and then memory, taking him gently by the hand, gave him back the shy glances, the faltering tones of those who in the days of the dead gone by, which could be his no more, would have been glad to take him for better, and equally ready to leave him if worse ever came.

'It's all a mystery,' he thought, as some time or other we have most of us thought, when trying to solve the great problem of lives mismatched, or worse than mismatched. And then he went back to town, and in the stir and bustle of London forgot the lesson of which, by the mournful sea, he had caught a mere glimpse, but which there was nothing surer than that, in some form or other, he would have to learn to the last word ere he understood Nicholas Gayre.

Once again time went on; the days flew by; two or three afternoons a week, occasionally more frequently, the banker ran down to Brighton; but he made no progress with Susan. In fact, he made as little progress with her as his solicitors seemed to do with the Oliver Dane conspiracy.

At last there came an hour when Susan spoke plainly. She was getting strong again; she could walk a short distance; the far-away look he had come to know so well lay constantly folded within the deep brown depths of her tender eyes. The roses which go on blooming, even over the grave of human hope and happiness, had begun to tint

her cheeks once more; her figure gave promise of again becoming rounded. The Susan he once knew had gone like the last year's snow, but a fairer, nobler, more worthy Susan paced the Marine Parade, rejecting the supporting arm he would have wished her to lean on for life.

Once again spring had come upon the earth—spring, early spring, that year filling the world with gladness—gay with flowers, bright with sunshine! All through the land hawthorn was blooming, and birds were singing, and wild flowers decking the fields and river-banks and copses.

The sea looked blue and glittering, as it lay calm under the azure sky; but Susan had no thought to spare for sea or sky or white-winged vessel. Still Oliver Dane remained at Portland, breaking his heart or eating it out, according to whether despair or frenzy was at the moment in the ascendancy.

'I mean to leave Brighton, Mr. Gayre,' she said at length, 'and return to London.'

'You prefer London?'

This was interrogative.

'I think I may be able to do something for Oliver there, and I know I am doing nothing here.'

Mr. Gayre bit his lip, but made no reply. They walked on a little further, and then Susan, pausing and looking over the parapet down at the shore beneath, went on,

'And I have been also thinking that when I go back to town it might be better if you did not call so frequently.'

'May I ask your reason?'

He knew his wisest policy would have been silence, but the question rose to his lips, and he had no power to restrain its utterance.

'You know,' she said, 'our arrangement was conditional—'

'Yes; but we mentioned no special time in which those conditions were to be fulfilled. It is not from any lack of endeavour on my part that—'

'I am quite willing to believe you,' she interrupted; 'it would be terrible to think, really, you had *not* done all in your power; nevertheless—'

'It is a matter which cannot be hurried—'

'I mean to try if I cannot hurry it; and if through *my* exertions Oliver should be set at liberty—'

'Our contract is to be considered at an end; is that what you want to say?'

'I feel it had better be at an end. You see,' she went on more firmly, now the first step had been taken, 'if Oliver's release cannot be procured *soon*, it may as well never be procured.'

'You think so?'

'Yes, I do. A few months more, and he will have been in prison for a year. You cannot tell me now, certainly, that at the end of another year he will be free. It may be all very well for us, standing here, able to go and come as we like; but for him—' and she broke off with a little passionate cry for help to the God she sometimes thought—she could not avoid thinking—had deserted her. 'If'—and her voice was calm and steady once more—'if, though innocent, I cannot prove his innocence—if there is no justice or mercy to be hoped for—we must bear our burden of sorrow as best we can. He has lived somehow through this awful time. If I can do nothing, I must live too, that I may meet him when he is once more free. I have made up my mind, Mr. Gayre. It was for Oliver I said I would marry you

if you obtained his release. It is for Oliver I say that, as you seem able to do nothing to help him, we must part. No woman cares less for the world's opinion than I; but I am bound to consider the man whose wife I mean some day to be. Though he has lost everything else, he shall find he has not lost me.'

Mr. Gayre did not answer immediately—he felt stunned. That she would arrive at such a decision was an idea which had never occurred to him. Something lay beneath the surface. Could Mr. Fife—could any one—have sent her that cutting from the Chelston paper? No, he scarcely thought that; but—

'I presume you do not mean to sit down and abandon Mr. Dane to his fate, without making some further attempt in his behalf?' he said.

'No. I told you I thought I could help him, and I intend to try.'

'And may I not be permitted to assist?'

'Well, you see, Mr. Gayre, your assistance hitherto has been of so little use, and—'

'I have asked such a price for it,' he finished.

'I would have been willing to pay that price for it—I would have paid *any* price almost, before my illness, to set Oliver free; and even since, till quite recently, no thought of refusing to act up to the letter of our bond occurred to me. But you have not fulfilled your part. Oliver is still in prison; time goes on, and nothing is done on his behalf. His innocence is not proved; even that free pardon of which you spoke is not obtained. Why should I remain in servitude when no good results to him? If nothing can be done by man, I must ask God to give Oliver and myself strength

to bear our burden with submission, and live as cheaply as possible, so that when he comes out he may have a home to receive him, and money enough to take us both abroad should he wish to leave England.'

'In other words, Miss Drummond, you have thought of some scheme by which you may obtain his release irrespective of help from me.'

'Yes, I have thought of a plan; but I daresay it would never have occurred to me, had your help promised to be of the slightest use.'

'May one inquire what your plan is? If it be a secret,' he added, seeing she hesitated, 'pray do not feel yourself under any compulsion to tell me.'

'There is no reason why I should not tell you,' Susan answered. 'Before I left London, if you remember, I received two anonymous letters.'

'Yes, I recollect.'

'Well, I think the writer meant kindly by Oliver and me.'

'Possibly.'

'And what has occurred to me to do is this: advertise and entreat the writer of those letters to come and see me. I have thought the matter over, and it seems to me there is hope in the plan, even if only a forlorn hope.'

'There may be.'

'You do not seem to think much good likely to result from my scheme?'

'My own have not hitherto borne so much fruit I dare venture to disparage yours.'

Her heart dropped down like lead at his words. Had he opposed her, she would not have felt half so much discouraged.

'It may do no good; I can but try.'

'And if you fail, Miss Drummond, do I clearly understand

that I am to make no future attempt?'

'Not unless—'

'Unless what?'

'Unless there seems a likelihood of something being done for Oliver immediately.'

'What do you call immediately—a day, or week, or month? Give me some idea of the time you mean.'

She paused a moment, then said,

'Suppose we fix a period of not more than three months.'

'And if within that time I can procure Mr. Dane's release, you will marry me?'

She paused again before she answered,

'Yes, I will marry you if meantime I fail to set him free through my own exertions.'

'I see.'

'And, Mr. Gayre, during that period you must not come to see me.'

'Or write?'

'I should like to know what you are doing.'

'The plain English of which is, you wish me to write.'

'I wish to hear about Oliver.'

'And if I have nothing to tell you I am to send no letter?'

'I would much rather you did not.'

'You are very plain spoken.'

She made no reply to this, only walked a little way before she said, 'I think I should like to go back now.'

Without a word he faced round, and they slowly returned the way they had come. Mr. Gayre's spirit was very bitter within him. He knew at any moment some circumstance might occur to make the Dane affair plain sailing. Over and over again he had told himself it was impossible no means could be found to liberate an innocent man. His solicitors, though slow,

were sure; but if Susan took the helm she would do one of two things—either run her vessel on a rock, or else, by dint of sheer determination, get the case brought so prominently before the public that Mr. Colvend, by mere force of popular opinion, would be compelled to urge his daughter to confession.

Further, he distrusted Mr. Fife. He could not understand the expression with which the ex-manager occasionally regarded him. He had no reason to suppose the man meant to play him false, yet that some scheme was maturing in his busy brain he felt it impossible to doubt. He knew him to be needy, unscrupulous, desperate. So far he had been living on the money Mr. Gayre had paid him; but from time to time he threw out hints which implied his views of the future were large, and that it was not his intention to render those dreams reality by dint of hard work.

'Had enough of it for dog's pay,' he explained; 'whatever halfpence might be going, Dane got; I had the kicks for my share.'

Likely as not, the moment Susan's advertisement appeared he would go to her, get money from her, and tell her the whole story.

'No; I'll stop that,' thought the banker, looking askance at his companion, who, with eyes bent down, seemed trying to solve some knotty problem, 'and you shall marry me yet. You will find you have not to deal with a boy, or even Oliver Dane;' having arrived at which conclusion he said aloud.

'Though I am not to write to you, you will write to me if you think I can be of any service; and you will not go away and hide yourself without leaving even an address where a letter might find you?'

'I did not do so before, intentionally,' she answered. 'You know I was so ill, so very ill. Just when you spoke I was thinking about the night when I came down here. It seems a long time ago, but perhaps you remember what a stormy day it was.'

Yes, Mr. Gayre did remember; he was never indeed likely to forget that journey from London, with the wind howling round the train, and rain dashing itself at intervals against the glass.

'It was a wretched day,' he agreed, 'and a more wretched evening.'

'Well, do you know, I could not rest in the lodgings, but came out here, where we are now, alone in the wild weather. I must have been mad to do such a thing, and I am going to tell you the strangest fancy. As I stood here—just about here—I felt sure I saw you pass. A strange idea, was it not?'

It was not half so strange and inexplicable as the tell-tale colour which rushed up into Gayre's face. He could not help it, he could not command his features.

'Were you here, really?' asked Susan, astonished. 'I always thought it must have been a fancy of mine, but—'

'It was no fancy,' said Mr. Gayre; 'I came down here on the Oliver Dane business. I hoped to have settled it that night.'

'And there was some one with you?'

The banker made a gesture of assent. He could not have spoken then to save his life.

'And he said—ah!' and Susan pulled herself up in the middle of her speech, as we sometimes start in the middle of a dream.

They did not exchange another word till they reached the lodgings. Mr. Gayre, though not invited to do so, followed the girl

in. Susan did not sit down, and so he could not.

'I am to go, then,' he said, 'and never return unless I bring you good news; it is rather hard for me, is it not?'

'It is better,' she murmured.

'Yes, for you, perhaps. I wonder, though, if my absence will make you as much happier as you suppose; whether you won't miss me a little? Before we part, can't you find one kind word, Susan, to say to a man who loves you as he never loved any creature before?'

It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name, but she did not take any notice that he had done so. Lifting her eyes she looked him straight in the face, and said,

'I will try to forgive you, Mr. Gayre.'

'Forgive me for what?' he asked.

'For hating Oliver, for seeking fee or reward in this matter, for doing so little to help him in his strait. I know you would not have done anything if you could have helped. Had the cases been reversed, he would not have acted as you have done. He would have moved heaven and earth to compass your freedom; he would not have tried to take your promised wife from you; he would not have insisted on a woman marrying a man she could never love nor respect, as the price of her lover's freedom.'

'Good-bye,' he said, holding out his hand; 'do not let us part in bitterness. You will be sorry, after I go, to think you could speak such cruel words. I asked for a blessing, and you give me instead something akin to a curse. I wanted some pleasant memory to carry away with me into the world, and you impute the worst possible motives to me, whose only sin has been loving you too

well and faithfully. No, you need not tell me to go; I am going. Why are you so angry with me, that you will not give me even your hand? What is the reason of this extraordinary change? why will you not speak? Well, I had better go, I suppose. Good-bye, Susan. Good-bye, my darling.'

'Good-bye,' she answered coldly.

He took a few steps towards the door; then, moved by some sudden madness, turned, and, before she could have the slightest idea of his purpose, had clasped her in his arms, and kissed her over and over again.

She did not struggle, she did not speak a word; only when he released her, which he did as suddenly as he had caught her to him, she stood for a second, looking with eyes full of wonder and reproach, and then, still in silence, walked out of the room.

Mr. Gayre was not, perhaps, in the happiest state of mind for seeking an interview with Mr. Fife, yet it was to that individual's lodgings he repaired immediately he arrived in London.

Before he slept he felt he must know the course Mr. Fife was likely to adopt. If Susan advertised for the writer of those letters, would he go to her? That was the question Mr. Gayre put plainly to Messrs. Colvend & Surlees' late manager.

'I sha'n't take a morsel of notice,' declared Mr. Fife. 'What's the reason of this new move? She's not satisfied, I suppose?'

'Very much the reverse.'

'What's the matter with her? Rome wasn't built in a day, or a night either, and it's not so easy to get a man out of gaol as anybody might suppose till he tried the experiment. Besides, what does she want her young man running loose about the world for?'



No doubt, if she could only realise the fact, he is far safer where he is; and, when all that is settled, why doesn't she marry you? I thought the matter was finally arranged.'

Mr. Gayre shook his head. 'We will not discuss Miss Drummond any further, if you please,' he remarked; and on Mr. Fife saying 'All right!' very cheerfully, the conversation would have ended, had not the ex-manager suddenly put this question:

'By the bye, Mr. Gayre, have you ever been to Tooting?'

'You asked me that same question some time ago,' said the banker. 'Is it a conundrum, or have you any special reason for referring to the place?'

'Well, yes, I have. Look here, Mr. Gayre, should you like me to put you in the way of making a lot of money?'

'Money is always useful. Is there a gold-mine anywhere in the Tooting direction?'

'There is a quagmire, at any rate, where a fortune is in the way of being lost. When I used the word making, I ought to have said saving. I can prevent your being a good bit out of pocket, or I am much mistaken.'

'Prevent my being out of pocket! What do you mean?'

'Precisely what I say. I believe I can be of use to you, Mr. Gayre; but I do not want a sum of money this time—I want a commission. Will you give me ten per cent on any loss I am able to put you in the way of avoiding?'

'I have no objection to make such a promise, if I see that the loss without your interposition would have been certain.'

'Will you stick to that?'

'Yes, subject to the condition mentioned.'

'The commission is too heavy.

Look here, let us say five per cent certain, and I will leave the rest to your generosity—or rather to your justice, for I don't believe you are generous.'

'You ought to be honest, Mr. Fife, for you do not flatter.'

'You would not give me sixpence more if I did flatter you. Now, before we engage on this other matter, I should like to understand exactly how you and Miss Drummond stand. She wants to see me, and you do not want me to see her. What's up?'

'I have told you. She thinks she can find some means to obtain Dane's release.'

'And supposing she did—what then? O, you don't want to tell me that; come, you had better. There was once a lion, you know, and there was likewise a mouse. Two heads are better than one, remember, particularly when the second head is mine. What was the nature of the arrangement you made with her?'

Mr. Gayre stood silent. Even to this man, who had been his evil genius, he could not tell the nature of the bargain he had made.

'Shall I guess for myself?' said Mr. Fife, with a nasty laugh.

'The arrangement was conditional—speak if I am wrong—and the lady now wants to back out of it. I could have told you exactly how it would be. They are all alike. The very best of them can't bear to wait a minute for anything. If you are unable to hand the article they ask for across the counter they will have none of it. You ought to have married her first, made her fulfil her part of the contract. She will never marry you now. If the truth were known, I dare say she is tired of Dane too—perhaps seen somebody else she fancies better than either of you.'

'No, *that* she has not!' exclaimed Mr. Gayre vehemently, finding voice at last. 'I wish to Heaven she had! She speaks of nothing, cares for nothing, thinks of nothing, but Oliver Dane. I can see she is now gradually making up her mind to wait for him. She has done a rule-of-three sum. One year has nearly gone by—seven years will in the same way pass somehow for both of them. Once she relinquishes all hope of getting the sentence reversed, she will put down the number of days before he can walk out a free man, and every night, after she says her prayers, strike one off the list.'

'Do you mean to say, then, matters are quite at an end between you? I thought, from your wanting me to keep quiet, you had not quite played out all your own cards. Tell me the real state of the case. After to-night you will not be able to devote much time to Dane's affairs, and you will need my help there, too, or I am greatly mistaken.'

Though still not easy to talk of the matter, Mr. Gayre found it easier to say he had still three months, during the course of which, if Dane could be set free, Susan would marry him.

'It's not long,' observed Mr. Fife, rubbing his chin, when, after a considerable amount of hesitation on the banker's part, he found himself in possession of the girl's expressed determination, 'but we must see what can be done. It is getting dusk now, Mr. Gayre; if you will kindly put on your hat, we will make the best of our way to Tooting. If you do not care to be seen travelling with me—and, indeed, it is as well we should not seem acquainted—we can behave like total strangers on our journey.'

'I leave the whole matter to

you,' said the banker carelessly; though, indeed, there was nothing he less desired than to be going about the world in the character of Mr. Fife's bosom friend.

Long before they reached their destination it was quite dark, but by the aid of a lamp close at hand, Mr. Gayre was able to take in most of the details connected with a fine old house, to which his companion silently directed attention.

It stood well back from the road, and was approached by a gravelled sweep, which enclosed a circular grass-plot. There were trees and shrubs of old growth about the place, and an air of stability and repose marked the house and its surroundings.

'You would not say that establishment could be kept up on a few hundreds a year,' suggested Mr. Fife, as they stood together looking over one of the entrance-gates. 'There is a stable at the rear, and one very good horse in it. There is a coach-house and a natty brougham in it. There is a garden which requires two men to keep in order; and there is a presiding deity in the shape of a lady, who cannot get through the day without being waited on by a butler, a maid, a housemaid, and a cook. Just a quiet, modest, steady-going, respectable establishment; no show, no ostentation; nevertheless, one that must require some small amount of money to keep going. Don't you agree in my opinion?'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Gayre, sorely puzzled.

'The lady,' proceeded Mr. Fife, 'who resides in that house is supposed to be a widow, possessed of a fair fortune. Her reputed name is Stanley. She is not very young—over thirty, at any rate—but she is handsome. You have taken in as many of the details of the

place as is possible, unless we could get inside, which we can't. We must not stand here any longer. I want to call on a friend in the neighbourhood for five minutes; so if you will charter a cab and drive home to Wimpole Street, and give your servants orders to admit me when I appear, I will follow you as quickly as possible.'

'You intend to tell me something you think I ought to know?'

'Yes; for Mrs. Stanley is not a widow, was never married, and has not sixpence of her own.'

'Then who—' began Mr. Gayre.

'What I mean to tell you when I get to Wimpole Street is the name of the man who supplies the sinews of war necessary to carry on that campaign.'

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AWAKENING.

MORE than an hour elapsed after Mr. Gayre's return to Wimpole Street before Rawlings, opening the library door, announced Mr. Fife. Contrary to his evening custom, that gentleman was perfectly sober; and as he deferentially took a seat opposite the banker, he looked once again a model clerk—a man who had not a thought, hope, wish, beyond the counting-house and his employers' interests.

He was paler than usual, and seemed fagged, which fact he accounted for by remarking,

'It's a long pull from Tooting here.'

'Surely you have not walked!' said Mr. Gayre.

'O no! I haven't walked; but take it any way you like, it's a long pull.' Then he sat silent for a while, contemplating the candlesticks as if he were appraising them.

'I am going,' he at last began, speaking slowly, and never removing his steady gaze from the candlesticks, 'to tell you the name of the man who keeps up the establishment we were looking at this evening. He is called Nicholas Gayre.'

'Are you mad?' asked the banker. 'I never was at Tooting in my life before. I never knew there was such a house as that you took me to see, and I never knew there was such a person on earth as the Mrs. Stanley who you say lives there till you mentioned it.'

'That may all be—indeed, I know it all is. Nevertheless, it is you and no other who rent that house, pay the wages, settle with the tradespeople, and spend Heaven only knows how much on madam—'

'You will perhaps presently kindly explain the enigma.'

'Presently—yes. I suppose'—and at this point Mr. Fife turned his eyes towards Mr. Gayre—'you will not dispute the fact that a business cannot stand still?'

'I should have thought it possible.'

'Should you? Well, it can't; nothing under heaven can stand still; it must be always advancing or retrogressing. When your great grandfather died he left a fine business behind him. When your grandfather died the business was a fine one still, but the diminishing process had begun. The world was going on, the business was being left behind. When your father died, comparatively, Gayres' had dwindled to quite a small concern; when you die—'

'Pray proceed; do not allow any feeling of delicacy to stop you,' urged the person whose end was so plainly alluded to. 'When I die—'

'There will be no Gayres if you

do not meantime either attend to your business yourself, or see that somebody else attends to your business for you.'

'May I ask the connection between all this and the house at Tooting?'

'Certainly; I am getting on to that. When your father died he left you, amongst other things, a safe business, if a small one.'

'You are quite accurate, Mr. Fife.'

'And a perfectly honest staff of clerks?'

'I believe so. Till quite recently I never had any reason to suspect the honesty of any one in the establishment.'

'And in that case it was not you discovered there had been peculation; it was your manager, Mr. Pengrove.'

'It was his duty to discover if anything of the sort was going on.'

'Exactly. And whose duty is it to discover if anything is going wrong with Mr. Pengrove?'

'With Pengrove! O, that is too absurd!'

'Is it? I suppose Mr. Pengrove's salary does not exceed eight hundred a year; in fact, I know it does not.'

'I do not know where or how you obtain your information, Mr. Fife, but in this instance it is correct.'

'While up to the year 1866 he had but five hundred. During the crisis of that summer he proved himself so able and trustworthy that your father advanced his salary to six hundred.'

'Again you are right.'

'Since that period you gave him another advance of a hundred; and last year, finding personal attention to business more and more irksome, and the society of your brother-in-law more and more fascinating, and your manager more and more trustworthy, you finally

raised his honorarium—that is the word, is it not?—to eight hundred.'

'Though of course delighted to find how thoroughly acquainted with the details of my business you are, I must confess to some surprise as to how you have mastered them.'

'I could tell you that, too; but it is a matter quite beside the question, and would only detain us from the point we have to consider. Mr. Pengrove, then, till about the end of the year 1871, had nothing except six hundred a year on which to support a wife, educate his children, and what is called "maintain his position."'

'Mrs. Pengrove was an heiress.'

'Heiress to what? No money, certainly. To ill-health, I admit, and a tendency, not uncommon amongst ladies, of rendering home somewhat unpleasant to her husband.'

'Do you know for a fact she did not bring Mr. Pengrove a fortune?'

'For a fact. Mrs. Pengrove was a Miss Garley, the daughter of a gentleman out at Homerton, who amused himself by preaching thunder and lightning sermons on Sunday in a little whitewashed barn, and supported a large family by selling exceedingly bad grocery through the week. Miss Garley had nothing but her face, and that soon faded; she looks now like a very poor portrait in water-colours which has hung for a long time on an exceedingly damp wall. Mr. Pengrove, I presume, told you his wife had a fortune?'

'Merely incidentally. Whether she had or not was, of course, no business of mine.'

'O, of course not; no more your business than whether Jane, your housemaid, meets her young man round the corner.'

'Mr. Fife, will you kindly say

in so many words how that house at Tooting concerns me?

'With the greatest pleasure. Mr. Pengrove is Mrs. Stanley's "trustee." Mr. Pengrove is constantly at the house on business; and one of these fine days he will marry the lady, and take up his abode at Tooting altogether.'

'Bless my soul, the man can't marry her! He has got a wife, as you are well aware, already.'

'Yes; but that wife can't live long. She has an incurable disease. It is only for "contrariness" she has not died long ago; and when she does die, you shall see what you shall see if you fail to put a stop to Mr. Pengrove's little game at once.'

'And what is his little game?'

'That is for you to find out. I have sketched an outline; you can surely fill in the details. I have no exact means of telling how much you will find yourself to the bad; but I should imagine the deficiency will turn out to be not less than a hundred thousand pounds.'

'What?' said Mr. Gayre; and he said no more, for the simple reason that he could not.

'And if you don't want to be utterly ruined,' went on Mr. Fife coolly, 'you will put your own shoulder to the wheel, and try to get your cart out of the rut.'

'But how,' asked Mr. Gayre, at length finding voice—'how could any man rob me to such an extent?'

'I'm sure I cannot tell; you know the position of your own bank better, I should imagine, than anybody else except your trusty friend and servant, Mr. Pengrove. If you have not money in your strong-room, you have, I suppose, money's worth. Where are you going? No, for Heaven's sake, Mr. Gayre, don't make any disturbance to-night. If you go

to Pengrove's house, he'll give you the slip safe as you are alive. Let it be till to-morrow morning. Get to the bank early—he's always there early; have him into your private office, and don't let him leave it till you know where every title-deed and bond and debenture is you may ere long be called upon to make good.'

'I will go down to the bank now, and examine the securities. If I find one missing, I'll give him in charge to-night.'

'Do; and I give you not longer than eight-and-forty hours to repent not taking my advice. Why, your bank is not a strong one—you know that; and if at a day's notice the deposits are withdrawn and all securities required, you may as well put up your shutters.'

'I would rather do that than—'

'But why should you do anything of the kind? You must make up your mind to lose a lot of money, but you need not lose all. If you must have revenge, well and good; but first count the cost. It's all very well to cut off your nose to spite your chin; but after a while a man must begin to miss his nose. If you only keep a quiet tongue in your head, you may pull through yet; if you don't, the Bank of England couldn't save you so far as to enable you to get a living out of Gayres' in the future.'

Far on into the night Mr. Gayre and Mr. Fife sat talking. According to custom, at a certain early hour the female servants repaired to bed, leaving Rawlings on guard below. He was the most discreet and faithful of butlers; yet even he couldn't help marvelling what his master could find to say to that low impudent fellow Fife.

'He might just as well ask me into the library, and order up a devilled bone and some punch

for my supper, as have him there,' grumbled the man to himself; and then Mr. Gayre's bell tinkled, and Rawlings, quiet and decorous, went up-stairs and waited just inside the door to hear what his master wanted.

'Shut that door,' said Mr. Gayre, 'and come in.'

Rawlings obeyed.

'I am afraid something is wrong in Lombard Street,' began his master.

'Truth is,' interposed Mr. Fife, fortified by hot brandy-and-water, 'I know there is a great deal wrong in Lombard Street, and have just come round to give your master a hint, and—'

'Allow me for a moment, please, Mr. Fife. I shall want your help to-morrow, Rawlings; therefore please see breakfast is ready at eight, and that you are at liberty to leave for the City at half-past. I will give you full directions in the morning.'

'Thank you, Colonel;' and the man could scarcely refrain from the old military salute, so delighted was he to be taken into confidence, so relieved to find this unaccountable intimacy with Mr. Fife indicated nothing worse than something going wrong in Lombard Street. 'Though, indeed,' thought Rawlings, 'that might mean a good deal to some of us. I wonder if the Colonel would go back into the army? I don't know how I should take to that myself after the life I've led here.'

'Do you think you can trust him?' asked Mr. Fife, as Rawlings left the room.

'I would trust him with my life,' answered Mr. Gayre.

'Ah, but this is not a question of life; it is one of money,' said Mr. Fife, with a sarcasm that would not have disgraced the banker himself.

Late though it was before Mr.

Gayre went to bed, he never closed his eyes. He had slept after the loss of his self-esteem, but he could not sleep now the loss of money was in question.

At last he realised all the bank had done for him; how little he had done for the bank. What Mr. Fife said was painfully true. As each succeeding Gayre for generations had departed he left, in proportion to the times, less money behind him. It was pretty nearly the old story of the single talent repeated in Lombard Street. Safety the Gayres had thought of to the exclusion of progress; and now, as a fitting sequel, the last of the name seemed likely to be not merely shoved up in a corner, but left, in addition, well-nigh destitute.

'And you have no one to thank but yourself,' Mr. Fife had most truly observed. 'If a man professes to be in business, he should attend to his business. Your father did not ask you to give up the army merely that you might drop into the bank for an hour a day. He could have found a dummy to do everything you latterly professed to do—better.'

It was of such utterances as these, and of how certainly he had left things to 'take their chance,' Mr. Gayre thought as he tossed restlessly from side to side.

Even then Ruin might be keeping watch in Lombard Street, though the outer world were still ignorant of her presence. Ruin! worse than ruin! Value lay, or was supposed to lie, in the strong room at Gayres' to a larger amount than the whole of the money he owned in the world would cover.

'Nothing had been advanced upon those deeds and mortgages and bonds, and plate and jewels; but'—and at this point Mr. Gayre



started up with the intention of going there and then to Lombard Street to learn the worst—'if these things were not forthcoming, how should he meet man or woman who had confided them to his keeping? The Act of God was one thing, the carelessness of man another; and Mr. Gayre knew, since he relinquished the idea of making Gayres' a big power in the City, that he had been criminally careless both of his own estate and the goods of other people.

'During this last year particularly,' conscience hinted, in no uncertain tones, 'each day you have been getting worse and worse; each hour you have been leaving more and more to subordinates.'

'A true bill,' he murmured. 'I have not done any real good since I saw Will Arbery riding Squire Temperley's hunter in the Park. Would to Heaven I had selected any other route that morning, never stopped to speak to Sudlow, never set eyes on my niece, never watched young Arbery managing that horse, never seen Susan Drummond! Yes,' he added vehemently, 'I would to God Susan Drummond had never crossed my path!'

It was not the first time he had expressed that wish; but even when the powers of good and evil were waging war within him, he had never felt it more fervently. To be not only lowered in his own esteem, but to be poor as well, seemed more than he could bear. Hitherto, if he gained Susan he accounted the world well lost; but when it came to the test, when he was called upon to lose much the world accounts of value, Mr. Gayre could not be quite so certain.

Suppose at that moment Ruin was actually in the cellars of

Gayres', crouching beside The Tortoise, removed from its proud position by his grandfather, what could Susan avail him? She did not love him rich; was it in the least degree likely she would care more for him when poor? How could he humble himself to tell her that even riches had refused to stop with him; that his boasted wealth was gone, and his social position also? She would say, perhaps, they would have to make the best of matters; say it with that look of half-contempt and whole dislike he had learned to know so well. He never could make her care for him: while the sun set and the moon rose, while grass grew and water flowed, he never, let him do what he would, might win a glance of love or a smile of welcome from the woman he had treated as a conqueror might a slave.

Over and over and over again, through the watches of that dreary night, he conned the words of that song so many of us, under like circumstances, have set to doleful music of our own making, the burden of which is *Loss*, and the refrain *Despair*.

He tried to sleep, but he could not. He strove to cheat himself into the belief Mr. Fife had spoken untruly, but even that poor reed broke as he touched it. Mr. Fife's way of talking was not that of a man who desired to delude or conciliate. Quite the contrary—Mr. Fife was terribly plain. He said Mr. Pengrove had stolen, was stealing, would steal; that Mr. Gayre had no more right to complain of having been robbed than a shopkeeper who puts his goods out on the pavement for any thief to walk off with.

'Confidence,' he went on, 'may be a very fine thing in theory, but your customers, I fancy,

would think caution a vast deal better in business. You should have kept your keys yourself, Mr. Gayre, and seen the locks were not tampered with.'

Long before it was time to go to Lombard Street Mr. Gayre had finished breakfast.

Having agreed to follow Mr. Fife's advice, he could not, as his inclination prompted, rush down into the City and go through the contents of Gayre's strong-room without another moment's delay.

'If once the affair gets wind you may suspend payment,' Mr. Fife told him. 'Follow my counsel, and, unless things are in a very much worse state than I think they have yet had time to get into, you may, with hard work and judicious management, pull through. But remember, you will have to work hard, and bring all your common sense to bear on the matter. Half the bankrupts in London smash up because the moment some bother comes they lose their heads. I am talking of the honest men. Swindlers rarely make a mistake of that sort.'

At length the moment arrived when he might make a move, and, like a greyhound let out of leash, Mr. Gayre started for the City.

It was the first time in his experience he had ever wished to go there; and even in the midst of his anxiety he could but smile to consider the reason. 'I have let all these years slip by,' he thought, 'and now in a moment the fear of poverty brings me to my feet, as the hope of gain never could have done.'

In Lombard Street he met Mr. Fife, and turned with him for a moment into Change Alley.

'Think you are in command again, Colonel,' said the ex-manager very earnestly. 'It needs as

much courage to face a difficulty like this as to stand fire. I'll be at hand when you want me.'

The interview between Mr. Gayre and his manager was not long, but it sufficed to change Mr. Pengrove's whole appearance. When he entered the private room he looked a smug, prosperous, respectable man of business; when he came out he resembled nothing so much as a thrashed hound, longing for a quiet corner in which to lay its aching bones.

But there was to be no quiet corner that day. He had to go on with his work just as if detection were still in the far distance. He was obliged to assist in checking the securities; he had to compel his trembling lips to speak and try to steady his hands, and strive to seem unconscious that even when, for appearance' sake, he went out at one o'clock for his accustomed chop, he was never lost sight of for a moment.

During the whole of that busy day Mr. Gayre's thoughts did not once stray to Susan Drummond. For the first time since their ill-starred meeting, he forgot the fact of her existence. The hours were so full of excitement and anxiety, Love found himself out of court; and when, late at night, the banker returned to Wimpole Street, he saw, almost with indifference, a letter addressed in a handwriting which four-and-twenty hours previously would have stirred his every pulse.

The contents were merely to the effect that Susan had returned to her former lodgings. The note began 'Sir' and ended 'yours truly.'

'I shall have to think about all this later on,' he considered, feeling in very truth he was unequal at that moment to think of any subject except whether it

would be possible to save his credit.

'You must get money, and that immediately,' had been Mr. Fife's last words before he left the bank, where he stopped for hours after every one else—even Mr. Pengrove—was gone; and it was how to get money without exciting wonder or arousing suspicion which occupied Mr. Gayre's mind as he walked ceaselessly up and down his dining-room.

Able to come to no conclusion, exhausted both in mind and body, feeling his tired brain at last refuse to answer to his call, he went wearily up-stairs to bed, where, perfectly certain he should not close his eyes all night, he fell into a deep and peaceful slumber.

The sun was streaming into his room, when he awoke with a start, and the words some one had spoken to him in a dream still ringing in his ears.

'Mrs. Jubbins will lend you the money—go to her.'

Yes, Mrs. Jubbins would lend him the money, but *could* he go to her?

Mr. Gayre thought not, and the close of another anxious day found him in the same mind.

'Have you decided the best way of quietly raising enough money?' Mr. Fife asked, when once again they parted at the bank. 'There is no time to lose.'

Mr. Gayre knew that. Nevertheless, he felt he could not possibly ask for help from Mrs. Jubbins.

'If your bank,' said Mr. Fife, who really was working heart and soul in the matter, 'had been like any other bank, there would

be no trouble about the matter; but no legitimate reason exists why Gayres' should be short of cash. You don't discount, you don't advance; you run no risks; you have done nothing like anybody else; and the consequence is, now you need to borrow, everybody will imagine there is something wrong. Yet money must be got till you are able to turn yourself round. Have you no friend who could and would help you at this pinch?'

Mr. Gayre answered that he had friends, but he did not like to ask them.

'Perhaps you would rather go into the *Gazette*?' suggested Mr. Fife. 'I foresee that will be the end of the matter if you delay much longer; and it would be a thousand pities. Lord, if you only had a few capable men about you, what might not be made of this business even now! Why don't you go to your solicitors?'

No, Mr. Gayre thought, he would not go to his solicitors then, at any rate.

'There is one person I feel sure would lend me all I want,' he at last explained, with a little natural hesitation.

'Then for Heaven's sake do not lose a minute in seeing him!' cried Mr. Fife. 'Any day or any hour some one of these things may be required, and the worst of most of them is, that no money could replace them.'

'That is too true unfortunately,' answered Mr. Gayre. 'I will go now, before I change my purpose.'

'That is right,' said Mr. Fife; 'and I hope from my soul you may be successful.'

(To be continued.)

## OUR PRIMA DONNA.

A Mess Story.

My story (said Nugent of Ours—Ours being the Royal Shetlanders) dates some few years back, and its opening scene takes place within the lovely grounds of The Prior's Mount, Jersey, upon one of the most brilliant, sunshiny, midsummer afternoons you can possibly imagine.

Some of you fellows now at this mess-table know The Prior's Mount well enough; but for the benefit of such as do not, I'll try and outline the charming spot.

It occupies the plateau of a hill near to and overlooking the town, harbour, and rocky roadstead of St. Helier. On its right, facing seawards, stands Elizabeth Castle, springing grandly from a bed of reefs and shingle; and beyond the fortress, peeping over it, as it were, you get a view of the tiny but most picturesque bay of St. Aubin, bounded to the west by the bold promontory of the 'Noirmont.' To the left your eye rests upon a tall, grassy, rugged cliff, whereon are built the military works of Fort Regent, and further, in the same direction, upon the sandy shores of St. Clement, with the toy-like railway to Gorey skirting them; while shutting out the vista from behind is a thickish belt of noble trees, which as yet the felling axe has spared from giving place to the planting of the ubiquitous and money-making potato. Close upon the verge of this wood the Manor House, or Seigneurie of the Mount, is erected; a plain but substantial modern structure, not worth even telling about were it not for the

reason that upon its emerald-green velvety lawn, within its well-kept flower-gardens and *parterres*, Mrs. Smithson-Pomeroi, Lady of the Manor, has, on the midsummer afternoon aforesaid, gathered together for an *al fresco* fête all the rank, fashion, and beauty the islet boasted of, and in the latter respect it is replete, very replete, as all the world is aware of.

'*Quæque ipse jucundissimè vidi*, which most pleasant things of myself have sane,' put in Pat Sullivan, our Irish medico.

Leaving a crowd of notables of both sexes unminded, let me place before your eyes, gentlemen, two guests who are at a certain moment walking towards a shady nook, where sits the hostess in state to receive her friends.

Both are ladies, one somewhat *passée* in age, coppery in complexion, and neither very elegant in appearance nor refined in conversation; the sort of Euro-Asiatic feminine indeed they call in the sunny East a *Che Che*. But what's in a name? *Che Che* notwithstanding, she is my Lady Honeydew, *alias* the Begum, the widow of an Indian general who got a K.C.B. and other distinctions for good services during the Mutiny. The other personage is Miss May Flower, Lady H.'s niece, a damsel of eighteen or twenty years; a new-comer from England by that very day's mail steamer, and, as you shall presently hear, the very perfection of youthful beauty and fascination. As her aunt pre-

sented her to Mrs. Pomeroy, a knot of us crowded round to take note of her 'points,' as a horsey man would put it.

'O, my dear good soul,' said Lady Honeydew, 'you really will forgive me, won't you, for bringing May, *sands cérémonie*, without invite, to this grand *tamasha*, as we say in Bengal! O my, how nice—*bote utcha*—you've got everything! lawn-tennis, Badminton, croquet, the band from the barracks, and the pipers, I do declare, in their kilts and *pooruns*' (she meant sporrans), 'just same like that *Burra Kana* Sir Peter and me gived to Lord Fireoaks when he came to Benares. But, you see, the poor child begged me so 'ard to come, to know you and all the Saabs, and the Mem Saabs, and made such a bobberee, that I 'adn't the heart to refuse her. So *nous voirsee*.'

Mrs. Smithson-Pomeroy eyed Miss May Flower from head to foot, and, seeming quite satisfied that her face, figure, costume, and style would do honour to her party, welcomed her warmly. And well she might, for May was about one of the handsomest girls you would come upon in any day's march in or out of Jersey. Her beauty was of that type we are wont to call the Spanish—that is to say, she had large, black, sparkling eyes, with just a suspicion of *espigleris* or archness lurking in their expression. Long silky lashes drooped over and matched the eyes in colour; pencilled ebony eyebrows went with eyes and eyelashes; and a glorious wealth of fine hair, darker and more glossy than any—any—any—

'Nubian blacking, if you want a word, Nugent.'

Well, then, Nubian blacking, gentlemen, as Melville suggests, peeped from under the very masterpiece of a Gainsborough hat. To

correspond with the roguish eyes, her nose was small, *retroussé*, and piquante; while per contra, her mouth was large, but so well cut, and filled with a set of teeth so spotlessly pure and white, that one almost wished that it—the mouth—were even bigger, so that more of its pearly contents could be seen. I don't know if any of you admire that fringe of darkish down which now and again more than hints at an embryo moustache upon a lady's upper lip; but if you do, May Flower would have satisfied your taste in that respect; in fact, the little thin black lines of demarcation right and left were rather pronounced than otherwise. Add to these attractions the clear transparent olive complexion of the decided brunette, a small well-moulded head, a middle-size shapely-formed figure, draped in light material of faultless cut and fashion, and you have the young lady's counterfeit presentment as she appeared at that Prior's Mount garden-party.

Of course, as she passed from one group of us to another, many were the observations, complimentary and otherwise, made about her. I shall leave untold all ungenerous ones, and regale your ears with those only, from masculine lips, which I overheard to be of a flattering nature.

'By Jove!' said Fred Hazelwood of the Gunners to Charlie Trehearne of Ours, 'there, that's what I call a sweet little six-pounder, fit for the Chestnut or Gray Battery, R.A.! Never saw a prettier nor better modelled Woolwich infant; cuts out all the other big guns here, like the electric wire cuts out the old fuse for firing an Armstrong, or a Martini-Henry rifle goes ahead of our grandfathers' Brown Bess of a flint-musket. Looks as if she would do some mischief in the heart-breaching and battering line. Whew! old

boss, won't she create a sensation as she walks down Beresford Street, "ranking past" that club where all the swells congregate !

'Even so, Freddie, my boy,' Mr. Trehearne, who was given to horseflesh, replied, 'And I'm open to odds—say, two to five—that the pretty black-maned filly, having made such a splendid start of it, takes the bit in her mouth, and goes the pace until she passes the winning-post, and comes in easy, hard in hand. I never felt more inclined to put my money upon a more likely nag to carry off those matrimonial stakes, which every one here is handicapping herself for. Come, Lacrosse, Lieutenant de Marine de la République Française, twenty to fifty in francs that May Flower, at present spinster, clears out of the rack, and starts for England or your own *belle patrie* within three months *femme couverte*, as you Frenchmen say.'

M. Lacrosse, thus appealed to, shrugged his shoulders, sighed, and answered,

'En vérité oni, mon ami, and ze more ! If ze Flower of May would but clare hout vid me, moi qui parle, in ze rôle of vat you calls a *ribs*, it would be ze 'ighest tops-gallants of 'appiness in ze life I ambition. My frend Teaurns, I vill visper in your air vun grand saycret. I am in ze spoons already vid de May Flower, Engleesh mees, and, ma foi ! I vill try my lucks.'

Meanwhile the object of these and other conversations moved gracefully about, was introduced by aunt and hostess here, there, everywhere, played lawn-tennis, listened to our band, chatted with young and old men and women, and finally drove away the lioness of that successful party.

Now the Begum, you must know, had a house in Rullecourt Terrace, Havre des Pas, and so soon as it was noised abroad that

the niece had taken up her abode with her, and was likely to make a long stay, than callers of all kinds flocked to pay their devoirs; and so incessant was the tingling of the front-door bell, and continuous the rap-tap-tap of its knocker, so loud the chat and boisterous the laugh, so unclassical the piano-playing and music-hally the singing day and night, that Signor Tromboni, teacher of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, to say nothing of the 'bones' and side-drum, who lived next door, and heard every word and every note through the thin scamped partition-walls, sacréd the *bête noire* of a Baboo, as he chose to call the Begum, and ungallantly threatened the fascinating May to indict her for a nuisance.

Now, if there was one thing more than another which we Royal Shetlanders were strong in at the time when Miss May Flower dwelt amongst us, it was theatricals: pure, old-fashioned theatricals; not your short skirts and tight fleshings burlesque and travesties, but your good, respectably-draped from neck to heels plays, of *The School for Scandal*, *The Rivals*, and such-like class. But one day, at a meeting of the Regimental Dramatic Society, it came into the head of a newly-joined youngster that it would be well if we ran a bit out of the groove of the legitimate heavy into that of the legitimate light; and that if, for instance, we put upon the stage a parody of one of Shakespeare's tragedies, 'Why, you see, Mr. President, that sort of thing will not compromise us nearly so much as if we gave travesties of other pieces which Messrs. H. Byron, Burnand, and Co. have so cleverly dealt with.'

How the juvenile reasoner argued is of no consequence; enough to say that his idea took, and that, after reading and rejecting *Romeo*



and *Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Shylock*, we settled upon *Othello*—*Othello* according to *Act of Parliament*, an operatic burlesque burlesque, written years before by Mr. Maurice Dowling. With a clip or two of the manager's scissors, nothing could be better; it was racy and sparkling, and contained such close and witty imitations of the original that, with one's ears 'cottoned,' so to speak, they might have been taken for the Divine William's own poetical effusions. So, the matter being decided, we set to work to cast the characters, the principal ones thus:

Iago, Lieut. Trehearne; Cassio, Lieut. Mark Mason, R.E. (a mild milksoppy sort of a Blue Ribbon Army officer in real life, an exact prototype of 'good Michael' in the play); Emilia, Miss Olive Wood; Brabantio, Captain Smith; Othello, your humble servant; for reason that he—that is, I—had been stationed in Jamaica, could speak the lingo, and imitate to the life the gestures of the out-and-out nigger, which the Moor of Venice is, according to Mr. Dowling, represented to be. But Desdemona—ay, there was a hitch; no one—wife, widow, grass ditto, or spin—in all St. Helier would accept the rôle of the fair and much-injured daughter of Brabantio; not a single lady, young or old, from the Shingles to Ronge Bouillon, would even in stage-life consent to leave papa's home, marry a nasty black man, and be smothered by him in a fit of jealousy.

'No, Captain Nugent, we don't do such horrible things. Go and ask your new, flighty, and'—satirically—'*so attractive* May Flower to take the part.'

'Happy thought, ladies; we will instantly.' And, to our unspeakable delight, not only did that captivating maiden consent, but aunty Begum urged her doing so.

'I love play-hacting,' she observed, 'and once in Dum Dum took the character of Portiar in *The Merchant of Venice*. O my! there's a lot of beautiful *gup* in Portiar's character, especially when she's dressed in man's clothes, and is spouting to the Maharajah and the Durbar. You recollect, Captain, what she says about mercy. Let's see, how does it go? O, so:

"The quantity of mercy is not strained;  
It droppeth, like the Gentile Jew, from  
heaven."

At which strange perversion of the text I, and others with me, screamed, and the Professor rapped vigorously at the wainscot to silence us.

So, things being now settled, we hired Peter's Hall, and began our rehearsals.

And here I wish you to note—for my story hangs upon it—that at the time when these rehearsals were *in esse* and the representation of the piece *in posse*, Jersey was in the height and heyday of its potato harvest, and that then, instead of one steamboat leaving St. Helier's early in the morning for Southampton and one in the afternoon for Weymouth, half a dozen went away every night for Hull, Goole, Fleetwood, Bristol, and other ports in England, all deeply laden with the new and much looked-for tubers.

Now during the preparations for the play aforesaid it frequently happened that Michael Cassio—Mark Mason, you know—and Desdemona—Miss May, to wit—were not to be found when wanted for the stage, and, hunted up, would be discovered together in out-of-the-way corners of the Hall, teaching each other their parts, they said—'*spooning awfully*,' we avowed; so that one day, when I suddenly came upon them without a scrap of Mr. Lacy's acting edition of the piece in their hands—their

only books each other's looks,' to alter Tom Moore a little—I could not resist the opportunity of rather pointedly chaffing the young lady with two lines of my own dramatic say, and which ran thus:

'Sweet Desdemona, Otello fear you too  
great or my  
 Wid Cassio, dear.'

At which she blushed and tittered, and replied, 'Please don't be a goose, Captain Nugent; I knew Mr. Mason at Chatham; we are old friends, and just now are deep in act two.'

So they were deep—profoundly deep—deeper than any one gave them credit for.

Well, the night of the performance arrived. Every seat in the theatre was filled, chiefly with swells, but with a sprinkling as well of the rough tourist element, and matters looked like an unrivalled success. The curtain drew up; scenes one and two went off swimmingly; so much so, that the juvenile adviser for travesty, instead of comedy or tragedy, said to me,

'I told you so, Captain; I thought we'd fetch 'em.

"Burlesque! burlesque 's the thing  
 To make the roof of Peter's Hall to ring."

When Miss May Flower entered, led by Iago and Roderigo to the Senate, she looked so transcendently lovely in her well-selected costume of satin trimmed with lace, and with the Begum's jewels glistening about her, that the whole house rose, and before she had even uttered one syllable the stage was ankle-deep in bouquets thrown at her. And when she began, in doggerel verse, to tell the Bailiff and Jurats—pooh! what am I saying?—I mean the Duke and Senators, 'Why she loved the Black!' she sang the lines, absurd as they are, so sweetly, so naively, and with such serio-comical pathos, that the enthusiastic audience

hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

And how was it that she did deliver them so purely and expressively? Simply because old Tromboni, like every one else, had bowed to her charms, had forgiven her all the row and clatter she had made, or caused others to make in Rullecourt Terrace, had taken her voice in hand, and had taught her, as he well could, all the tricks and dodges of dramatic singing, even when it ran out of high art into the too-roo-rooral, right-fol-de-rol-de-rol style.

I have not the least intention of taking you step by step through *Othello* as it is written in that edition we were rendering; I want to jump as quickly as possible to its last scene, and to show in what an unusual way the curtain fell upon the grand *tableau* and *exceunt omnes*.

Suppose, then, that Cassio has been found tipsy, as subaltern in command of the main guard; that *Othello* has summarily 'broke' him,

'Michael, to you him bery partial;  
 So—him dismiss you widout hab court-martial!'

that Desdemona has prayed for his reinstatement; that Iago has raised the jealousy of the nigger, who, as in the original version, determines to smother his wife. But, at variance with Mr. William Shakespeare, Mr. Maurice Dowling elects that the smothering having been effected, and while *Othello* is in bitter despair and remorse, Desdemona shall come to life again, sing, dance a breakdown, kiss, make friends, and be happy. It is the regular groove of every travesty; you never see one end in tears—*jamais!*

So, after the well-known soliloquy of the Moor in the bed-chamber, which Mr. Dowling imitates so cleverly—so near to the

Shakespearean text that it verifies the axiom of but 'one step from the sublime to the ridiculous,' and which, I flatter myself, I spoke with true Robsonian pathos, I rushed to Desdemona's couch, which was placed in a recess at the back of the scene, to 'gib the last, last kiss,' and then to asphyxiate my supposed unloyal wife with huge straw palliasses, according to stage directions, when, to my utter surprise, this theatrical better-half was not reclining there in waiting for the 'fatal blow, him skin a-looking more white as snow.'

'Call-boy!' I exclaimed, making a feint, and putting my head behind the side scene, 'where is Desdemona? Summon Miss Flower from her dressing-room—sharp!—Tell her we're waiting.'

And then, taking it for granted that the audience were clapping hands and shouting for an encore, I recommenced the speech, dwelling upon every word of it to gain time:

'Yes! she—must—die—or—else—again—  
Perhaps—she—will—betray—more—  
men—'

Him—jist—put—out—de—light—and—  
den—'

—— Him settle wid Desdemona.  
Put—out—de—light—'

Here I saw the call-boy's face peeping from the upper entrance left. He beckoned to me, and I edged towards him, covering the movement with some stage-play.

'Please, Captain Nugent,' he hurriedly whispered, 'Miss Flower is not in her dressing-room, nor in the green-room, nor in the painting-room, nor nowhere. I've looked all about, and bawled myself 'oarse. And please, sir, Mrs. Turner, the 'all keeper, says she seed 'er and Mr. Mason a-going hout together at the Lane door quite loving like; and she thinks, she does, as 'ow they've aloped.'

'What?'

''Loped, sir—gone to git mar-

ried. O, please, sir, it's not my word, sir, it's Mrs. Turner's. For, says she to me, "Bill 'Ill, there's a something hup; for when I was a-passing the Rectory I seed lights in the parlor down below, and a cab a-standing at the gate; and there nivr is no lights a-burning in that parlor at this hour a-night, excipt a nappy pair is a-standing on the matrimonial carpet, as they calls a piece of druggit in the middle of that room, and the rector is a-splicing on 'em in the banns of widlock."

By this time the audience were in an uproar, and howls and cat-calls were being uttered mixed with cries for 'Desdemona!' 'Delicate Desdemona!' 'May Flower!' 'Flower of May!' 'Miss Flower!' 'The Missing Link!' and suchlike vulgarities. The row was terrible; there was no suppressing it; so I ordered the curtain to be dropped, and came before it.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' I began.

'Silence!' 'ear, 'ear!' I distinctly heard Lacrosse's voice bawl out.

'Precisely!' I continued. 'It is exactly as monsieur observes, ears, not lips and lungs, I want. I've come to tell you a horrible tale. Miss May Flower, the successful Desdemona of this evening's entertainment, has, according to statements just communicated to me, effected in private life that which the playwright has made her do in her theatrical one—skedaddled, or, as my informant puts it, "aloped." And as even in Jersey, where quaint and singular institutions exist, it takes two individuals, male and female, to constitute a *bonâ fide* regular elopement, I beg to let you be cognisant of the fact that Michael Cassio of our play, Lieutenant Mark Mason of the *Army List*, is the masculine slip away.'

'What? who? the Begum's

loud shrill tones shouted out; 'repeat it again, Bahadoord Nugent, say it once more.'

I had no occasion to do so. A 'five-pounder' excursionist from the gallery howled, 'Cashio and Deresdemonie—they're the two, marm, as 'as stepped it.'

'Him! Her! Gone!' poor Lady Honeydew exclaimed. 'How! when?' Then breaking into a song set down for Brabantio in the burlesque, and which she recollected, and seemed to think applicable, she screeched out hysterically,

'Follow, follow, that's dear creatures!  
Look in every cab you see  
For my niece's beauteous features!  
She's the image, mind, of me.'

Which was not paying May any compliment, as we all saw.

'O Lady Honeydew,' observed Mrs. Smithson-Pomeroy, 'don't fret—they must be all safe; they can't by any chance be far, nor can they get out of the island before to-morrow morning; you may readily stop their flight if you like.'

'Indeed I will; I'll *puckerlao* (lay hold of) them with a vengeance! Moosier Lacrosse, give *kubbur* (news) to the police *logue* (people), and have the two put into *chokee* (the station). I'll stop them!'

O, could she? Deuce a bit! A 'potato-boat' had sailed at eleven that very night for Littlehampton, and in her captain's cabin, the only place that was not jammed up with baskets and barrels of early Jersey "spuds," were Mr. Mark Mason and Miss May, happy in mind, but terribly sea-sick in body.

'Telegraph to Little'ampton

and arrest them on landing,' said the poor Begum, when the tidings of the levánting were realised by her. 'That *soor* (pig) Mason owes me money—I cashed his cheque on Cox this morning; and as for that nasty flighty ugly May, she has got on all my Brussels lace, Ceylon pearls, and Golconda diamonds, which I lent for that disgusting vulgar play.'

At an early hour on the following morning Lady Honeydew hurried with a telegram to the post-office.

'*Telegraphic communication with England interrupted.*' That was a placard she saw conspicuously displayed in the window.

'Ah! bah! wah! Ráma is down upon me!' she cried, weeping and wringing her hands. 'But never mind! I'll let them *jao* (go), and joy go with them, the *budmashees* (wretches).'

Joy did go with them—wedded joy. The next day Lady Honeydew heard from May that she and Mark had been married at Littlehampton, and that the lace, pearls, diamonds, and money would be forthcoming.

So ended this escapade. In future, when possibly erratic young ladies, and probably nomadic young gentlemen, were amongst our *dramatis personæ*, we engaged Centeniers and other local peelers—*chuprassies*, *peons*, and *bobby-wallahs*, our friend the Begum dubbed them—to watch the doors of the theatre on the nights of performance, and to intercept and bring before *materfamilias*, or commanding officers, suspicious runaways.

[illegible]



VALENTINE MORNING.

'Love! why do we one passion call,  
When 'tis a compound of them all?  
Where hot and cold, where sharp and sweet,  
In all their equipages meet;  
Where pleasures mix'd with pains appear,  
Sorrow with joy, and hope with fear.'

SWIFT.

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